

By the same Author

LADY PRECIOUS STREAM
THE WESTERN CHAMBER
THE PROFESSOR FROM PEKING
MENCIUS WAS A BAD BOY

The
BRIDGE of HEAVEN
A NOVEL
by
S. I. HSIUNG
WITH A PREFATORY POEM BY
JOHN MASEFIELD



LONDON: PETER DAVIES

To DYMIA

Sometimes my severe critic
Sometimes my enthusiastic collaborator
And always my loving wife

FIRST PUBLISHED JANUARY 1943
REPRINTED JANUARY 1943
REPRINTED FEBRUARY 1943
REPRINTED APRIL 1943
REPRINTED JULY 1943
REPRINTED JANUARY 1944
REPRINTED APRIL 1944
REPRINTED AUGUST 1944
REPRINTED NOVEMBER 1944
REPRINTED MARCH 1945
REPRINTED NOVEMBER 1945
REPRINTED MARCH 1946

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORISED
ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR PETER DAVIES LIMITED AT
THE WINDMILL PRESS, KINGSWOOD, SURREY

On reading

THE BRIDGE OF HEAVEN

*To Ta Tung, as a boy,
This hope gave gentle joy,
To plant, in some green close,
A plum-tree or white rose,*

*That, so, in Spring or June
The lamp of the full Moon
Might show to Man the flower
White, in its whitest hour,*

*That, those who came to seek,
Would whisper: "Will she speak
This Wonder? Will she bless
Our woes to nothingness?
Will she descend the green
Sweet sprays, and be our Queen?
Our Saviour Queen? O, still . . .
She moves . . . She will."*

*Then, growing-up, he found
No garden-close, no ground,
In all wide China's space
To be a planting-place
Instead, an iron will
To learn to kill, and kill,
The tangle of the weeds
That thwart men's needs.*

*Thus is Man's youth today,
An April without May,
A May without a June,
Night without Moon.
But Hope from thwarted lives
In unquenched beauty strives
Slowly its glimmer breaks
The darkness of mistakes.
So many million flames
Will burn away the shames;
Ta Tung will surely find
His plot of Peace of Mind;
His blossomed plum will lift
White as the snow in drift,
Under a Moon of Peace
In skies like the still seas.*

October 15th, 1942

PROLOGUE

*"A melon seed will not bear weed,
Nor nettle, violet.
If you sow deed of grace or greed,
Heaven will not forget."*

THE humble author is greatly honoured to begin his book by recording a deed of philanthropy. In the glaring sun on a hot day in the 7th moon in the 5th year of the reign of the Emperor Kwang Hsu (1879), a handful of men were sweating and groaning under their heavy task of rebuilding a little bridge across a small river about 25 li (a li is roughly a third of a mile) south of the city of Nanchang, the provincial seat of Kiangsi.

The public had no cause to thank these hard-working men, for they were paid for their work. And though they were working unusually hard because the job should have called for more hands, that was due to the miscalculation of their boss the builder. He had undertaken the job for eighty taels of silver and he must abide by that bargain. He ought to have known from the very beginning that that was not enough, for he was a shrewd business man. Probably when he saw he couldn't get more, he thought it was better to accept rather than to displease his old customer. He told his men bluntly that even with the cheapest material in the market, he still had to find some other way to make up the loss. Naturally the workers had to make their contribution by working harder than ever.

The man whom the builder did not dare to offend was Li Ming. He was a philanthropist by profession, and because of his devotion to such excellent and praiseworthy work, Heaven had been very kind to him. He was now by far the richest man in the district. Practically all the ricefields for many scores of li around were his

property and with a few exceptions all the villagers were his tenants. He was generous by nature and never once refused to give free tea or rice to beggars who came to his door. He believed that Heaven would never let a good deed go unrewarded. Those who had a bowl of tea from him would water some of his plants and those who had his food were sure to leave some manure in his ricefields before they could get out of the bounds of his property.

Li Ming lived in a big mansion with vermilion gates about six li north of this bridge and the name of the place was called the Village of the Li Families. There were about five hundred households in the village and, except a few shopkeepers and traders, all the village people were farmers. Though he was not the headman of the Li clan, Li Ming considered himself much more important than this elderly leader of the village whose little cottage with mud walls and thatched roof was not fit to be Li Ming's stable. Strictly speaking our philanthropist was occupying only half of this impressive mansion. But it was only his half which was impressive, the other half, occupied by his good-for-nothing younger brother, Li Kang, being virtually unmentionable. Inside those beautiful lacquered gates there was a spacious court-yard which led to two pairs of secondary gates, and here started the marked difference of the two brothers' private households. While the gates on the right which belonged to Li Ming were kept brightly varnished and knockers polished, those on the left which belonged to Li Kang were in such bad repair that even when they were shut one could see the inside of the house through the crevices on the panels.

In spite of maintaining his house in such good order, Li Ming seldom spent a single piece of money on the decoration of the building. It was always when he gave a big contract to the builder for a job connected with some philanthropic purpose that he would ask the builder

to repair some part of his house as part of the bargain. As years went by and the builder got to know him well, he never needed to mention such repairs himself. The builder now thought it his duty to see that Li Ming's house was always kept in perfect condition. And then, there was a staff of six servants in the house. As Li Ming's household consisted of no one else beside himself and his wife, the domestics had ample time to take good care of the appearance of this magnificent mansion, or, to be more exact, half of the mansion.

For a country house like this a domestic staff of six would be considered extravagant. But Li Ming, though extremely generous by nature, would never countenance extravagance. The fact was that he actually spent almost nothing on the wages of these people. And for a great philanthropist, six servants were hardly sufficient. Because of his profession, he had to maintain social intercourse with influential people, such as the magistrate of his district and even the prefect of his county. He therefore must have a *ta-ya* (butler), an *erb-ya* (footman), a porter, a cook, a gardener, a couple of maids for the middle and bed chambers, and at least two bondmaids for housework and odd jobs. But under Li Ming's economical management, six servants—and two of them were under age—were more than enough to look after all the requirements of his household.

Old Wang, who first came to him looking for a job as a teacher, was a distant relative, well educated but incapable of earning a living. His handwriting was awful and he could never command the respect of his pupils. After several unsuccessful attempts, he at last consented to act as the honourable book-keeper for Li Ming's house in return for board and lodging. Li Ming assigned him the room inside the front gates and he found that he was obliged to answer the door and receive the visiting-card

and carry it into the house whenever there was a caller. He understood perfectly well that Li Ming, who trusted nobody (including his wife) with money or accounts, had no need of a private book-keeper, and so he had to try to be useful in the house in other capacities. As long as he could maintain the wearing of the long gown, which was a clear indication that he was a literary man, he did not at all mind performing the duties of butler or porter, provided nobody called him by such disagreeable titles.

Old Chang was engaged to be the cook at a very reasonable wage, but Li Ming saw no reason why he couldn't earn his own wages by cultivating the extensive flower garden on the other side of the house and turning it into a kitchen garden. While he undertook all the heavy work, Old Wang frequently gave a helping hand with lighter jobs. Indeed, this kitchen garden yielded more vegetables than the household could consume and Old Chang was able to sell in the early morning on market days those that they could spare. The takings from these sales covered more than Old Chang's wages. Of the two maids, Kao Ma was nearly sixty. She came to the house with her mistress as the bride's waiting-maid. She had nobody related to her, and so had no use for her wages. It was therefore arranged that her master should invest her wages for her until they became a lump sum, so as to buy her a good coffin and give her a decent funeral when she should die. Wen Ma, the younger maid, gave her services free in exchange for food and shelter because she was very grateful to Li Ming who had secured for her husband a small job in the Magistrate's yamen. The two bondmaids, Double Blessing and Great Happiness, came into service when they were about twelve. By the time they could marry, their future husbands would have to pay Li Ming the expenses incurred in keeping them.

However, Li Ming was by no means satisfied with his

servant problem. He often complained that it was a great burden to him. Their wages, he used to say, were of small consequence, but he was virtually giving the six of them their clothes, food and shelter. This made him remorseful. All his and his wife's old and worn garments which second-hand clothes dealers refused to buy had to be given to the servants. Though they might look a little shabby, they were still wearable, and he thought it wise to dress his domestics thus because this clearly indicated to his friends that he had made no money out of his philanthropy. As for the shelter, it was true that it did not cost him anything extra, but their food was the main problem. All of them were big eaters, and he was obliged to supply, according to the custom, a meat dish twice a month. This was called *Ya-chi* or "Sacrifice to teeth". On the 1st and 15th of every month he had to buy a catty (a catty equals 22 ounces) of pork to be boiled in a big boiler to make what was called a meat soup. Among the servants, however, it had a different name. They spoke of it as "a pig in the East Lake", which well illustrated how much meat and how much water there was in this dish. Unfortunately Kao Ma was a pious follower of some Buddhist principles. She strictly maintained her fast days, which were the 1st and 15th of every month. Being all alone in this world, she took up this religious duty hoping that Heaven would give her a better life in her next existence. Therefore she had to be a vegetarian all the year round and the other five servants did their best to encourage her to keep on with this praiseworthy resolution of hers.

It is needless to say that the owner of the other half of the mansion had no servants. In fact, Li Kang could not have afforded them even if he had not been so dead against keeping servants. Although Li Ming and Li Kang were brothers, and lived so close to each other, no two persons

were more different from each other. Since the death of their father, Li Ming, who proposed and executed the division of the family property, had been faring a thousand times better than Li Kang. As the elder son, Li Ming inherited a little more, but even then it was meagre. While Li Kang had been sitting there and eating up his estate (as the saying goes) Li Ming had been very active in managing his share. He had cut down his housekeeping expenses and, prompted by his generous nature, had allowed his hard-up tenants to go rent free for a whole year—on the single condition that all rents should be increased substantially as from the year following. It was in this way, and with the good fortune which Heaven gave him because of his philanthropic works, he was able to buy nearly all the real estate in the district.

Since he did so much for charity, Li Ming could easily have secured for himself a nice big house in the city at a bargain price. But their father, who seemed to have foreseen Li Kang's inevitable misfortune, had forbidden them to leave each other, so that they might look after each other if one of them should be in difficulty, and as a last wish on his deathbed made them promise never to move away from their old homestead till they died. Though the mansion was virtually divided into two houses by a wall in the middle, there were two pass doors to make them on more intimate terms. One was in the front part of Li Ming's quarters, leading to Li Kang's forecourt and thence to the big garden which was on the extreme left. The other was at the back of Li Kang's quarters, leading to Li Ming's kitchen, and thence to the barns which were on the extreme right.

In dividing the whole building, they had great difficulty over the question of the garden and barns, both of which seemed indispensable to them. As it would never do for Li Ming to have only the barns and to leave the entire

garden to Li Kang, and equally impossible the other way round, Li Ming at last thought of a solution. He proposed that he should have the use of the garden and in return his spare barns should always be placed at the disposal of his younger brother.

This arrangement later on proved to be very satisfactory to Li Ming. For Li Kang's store of rice, which was his only source of income, diminished annually at a quick pace, and very soon a small space in the corner of one of Li Ming's barns was all that was required. As for the garden, Li Ming enjoyed the use of his share to the fullest extent by uprooting all the decorative flowers and useless trees planted by their father and grandfather, and having household vegetables raised there instead. He said that a bargain was a bargain, and that he would be extremely sorry for his younger brother when Li Kang should have no further use for the barns. Though a philanthropist, Li Ming said he had no sympathy for a spendthrift who could squander a fortune so rapidly.

To his family, Li Kang was not only an expense but also a problem. He was the cleverer of the two and was not only the favoured child of their parents but also the favoured student of the teachers. In spite of being so brilliant a boy and scholar, Li Kang never managed to pass his first state examination, and consequently he disappointed his family through failing to acquire the official title of "The Cultivated Talent". Neither did Li Ming pass, but he did try and tried very hard—only it was no use. In the case of Li Kang it was because he would not try. And when he was at last made to try, he simply threw his chance away for nothing!

For once in his life Li Kang was first coaxed and finally pushed into the state examination building. There, having finished his essays and poems in next to no time, he saw in the next cell an old student with white hair and white

beard trying to commit suicide by hanging himself. He hurried to his rescue and asked the reason. He was told that it was the last effort of the old man, who knew, alas', that he was going to fail again Li Kang, on glancing over the old man's papers, agreed that this was very probable So he exchanged papers with the old man; and the result was that while his name was not on the list at all, the old man actually passed with honours. Of course he could have asked for a handsome fee from the old "New Cultivated Talent", but he never liked even to mention money, although he spent it recklessly enough When people asked him about the result of his examination, he confessed that he had failed, but that he felt a far happier man.

After this experience, nothing would induce him to go near the examination building. After all, to hope to pass is to hope for a government post, and he utterly loathed government officials. Like a good elder brother, Li Ming tried to make a merchant out of him, and commerce proved to be an even more expensive enterprise to him than anything else As a business man, he seemed to be very successfully amassing a huge turnover, and within a few months he returned in triumph, minus his capital. So far from thinking of profit, he simply could not bring himself to include even his personal expenses in the prices of his goods. In his opinion, to sell anything above what he had paid for it was crooked business

As for farming, at which he had been trying his hand for years, the result of his labours made his elder brother laugh so much that the topic soon established itself as a family joke. He kept a small patch of ricefield unlet in order to experiment on it with all his fantastic new ideas, and the crops it yielded had never once half covered the wages of the farmhands temporarily engaged by him during the busy season. He frankly confessed that he was

a man without a profession and styled himself "a gentleman at large", but said he was determined to bring up his son, even when he was only two years of age, to be a good farmer, a statement everybody pooh-poohed

Though Li Ming prided himself on being in every way a worthy member of his family, there were two things for which he envied his unworthy younger brother. In the first place, he himself knew that he was a much inferior scholar to his brother and could never succeed at the state examinations, and there was nothing on earth he desired more than to be a "Cultivated Talent"—and then, of course, a government official. Though neither did Li Kang succeed at the examination, it was well known and accepted by everybody that if he had cared, he would have had no difficulty in coming out on the list. Li Ming was rather thankful that his younger brother had been a good-for-nothing fellow, and he himself took the earliest opportunity of making a donation to the government, for which he was nominated as a magistrate-in-reserve. As he could not bear to pay more, this was merely an empty title giving him the gratification of wearing a golden button of the seventh rank.

The other thing that made him feel sore against his younger brother was the fact that Li Kang had a son while he had none. Some people tended to forget the old saying that charitable people seldom have descendants and the stupid village folk always remembered the silly proverb that after all Heaven was just in not blessing the avaricious with children. During the first few years after their marriage, Li Ming and his wife were merely disappointed at not having a son, and were always hoping against hope that they would have one next year. But as years rolled by and still there was no sign of such a happy event, Li Ming became desperate. For the past two

"‘Outwardly strong but inwardly dry’ indeed!” repeated the angry husband again and again.

But at last these words began to impress him more and more and he said guiltily to her “After all, our sages have remarked that of the three cardinal offences against filial piety, not having a descendant is the most unpardonable. Since you are not really as healthy as you look, perhaps I ought . . . er . . . I ought to . . . er . . .” He found it difficult to finish his words and turned away slowly but still looking at his wife from the corners of his eyes

“Are you suggesting that you ought to take a concubine?” His wife at once knew what was in his mind

“It is not because I have any other thought . . . You must realise that I am no longer young . . . and I have never been unfaithful to you for these thirty years. But how can I see my ancestors in the other world if I die without a son?”

His wife knew that he was faithful to her, but she also knew that her husband, who was economical by nature, cherished his money bags much more than he did women. A woman, however cheap, is always an expense. Therefore she owed her good fortune to her husband’s love of money much more than to his love for her.

“I am not a jealous woman, but it is against my principles to allow you to bring a vixen home. I don’t want you to ruin our family. You ought to have heard the well-known saying that if you wish to do someone harm, advise him to take a concubine.”

“We will select a girl with a very amiable nature . . .”

“I will not tolerate any minx, no matter how amiable you may say she is!”

“But you also want us to have somebody to make sacrifice to our tombs when we are dead . . .”

“We can adopt your younger brother’s son, Ta Yu. He is a very nice boy . . .”

"But he is an only son . . ."

"Which only means that Ta Yu will be 'a son continuing the lineage of two families'. It is a thing quite ordinary and often done. He will take one wife by whom if he has any children they will be your younger brother's descendants, and another wife by whom if he has children then they will be our descendants."

"I would rather die without descendants than see all my money go to the son of a spendthrift. I loathe the boy! I do not want to have that 'book-seller' become the seller of my estates!"

Ta Yu, Li Kang's son, was nicknamed by Li Ming as the 'book-seller' because Li Kang had by now practically sold all his ricefields and the only things he had in plenty were books. Li Ming predicted that as it would be impossible for the boy to follow his father's footsteps by selling ricefields, Ta Yu would only be able to sell his father's books when he grew up.

"Anyone who consented to be a concubine would be a wretched girl from some horrible family, and she would be sure to survive you and then sell everything you possess! No! No! I will not tolerate a concubine!"

"What, then, do you propose to do?"

"Wait a few years more . . ."

"Haven't we waited long enough?"

"Just for a year or two more I'm still under forty. My father was forty-three when my younger brother was born."

"But I am forty-nine already! Your mother was then much younger than you are now, wasn't she?"

"My mother told me that when my father wanted to spend a thousand taels to take a sing-song girl in as concubine, she advised him to spend the money in charity, and the very next year my younger brother was born. Why don't you do the same?"

"You know that I have been doing things for charity all my life!"

"But it is different. In order to move Heaven, you must really spend some money of your own this time."

Li Ming was silent. He calculated the various sums of money he had vainly spent on doctors and medicine and was heartbroken to find that they amounted to much more than he could bear to give away for any reason. Had he known they would not work at all he would never have spent the money, or at least would have used it in trying some other way. Perhaps real charity was better. Anyhow, he must try it. When his wife saw he was wavering, she pressed on.

"Rebuilding bridges and repairing roads are most charitable acts which never fail to please Heaven. Why don't you rebuild the little old marble bridge over the river of the Village of the Mei Family's Ferry?"

"I had thought of that long ago. But as the people of the Village of the Mei Family's Ferry are all wretchedly poor, I couldn't possibly get any money out of them. And residents in other places would not give much if they were told that the people of the locality gave so little . . ."

"No, I don't mean the usual way you go about it, but if you will pay the money all by yourself . . ."

"All by myself? Woman, you don't know how much it will cost! The marbles have to come from Yunnan Province, and a thousand strings of pieces of cash may not be sufficient!"

"My father spent a thousand taels of silver . . ."

"A thousand taels! I hate the city people who make a show of their riches by spending money in taels of silver. Actually a thousand taels of silver are much less than a thousand strings of pieces of cash, only they sound so impressive. When we say a string we mean a thousand pieces and the most we can do is to pay nine hundred and

fifty, claiming the five per cent discount which is in usage with paper currency. But a tael of silver could be paid in broken silver, which is worth less than eight hundred pieces of cash now."

"But no matter whether it is in silver or pieces of cash, the more you spend on charity, the more Heaven will be pleased with you."

"Even if I do this bridge, I couldn't get the marbles for it now. It will take at least two years to get them here from Yunnan."

"Then do it in granites, there are plenty of them everywhere."

"Even granites are too expensive for charitable work. Sandstones and wood are as good as anything else for such purposes. And if I am to pay for it all by myself, I must consider it very carefully."

"Remember, this time it is for a son!"

"I must talk with the builder first"

On the following day the builder was sent for and the result of this interview was the wonderful deed which made the whole neighbourhood talk. People only thought how generous Li Ming was in doing such a splendid thing for the public, but nobody realised what a difficult task he had had in striking a bargain with the builder. The work was originally estimated to cost at least a hundred thousand pieces of cash and Li Ming talked himself hoarse to get the builder to consent to a reduction of twenty per cent by suggesting that the cheapest possible material should be used.

As soon as it was agreed eighty strings of pieces of cash were enough, Li Ming started another drive for a bargain. His argument was that as the work this time was not financed by the public but by himself alone, the builder must show a little appreciation by being a little more economical in men and material. After the builder had

been coaxed to allow a further discount of ten per cent, Li Ming hinted that as he would not expect the builder to do any repairs for his private house as an understood part of the contract, he must ask for a final reduction. But the builder stood firm, and Li Ming tried threats and sweet words in turn. At long last, after he had utterly exhausted the patience of the builder, the bargain was successfully settled at the agreed sum of eighty taels of silver, which Li Ming said sounded much better than sixty-four thousand pieces of cash.

An auspicious date was chosen to start the work and Li Ming made a generous offer to the workers that he would serve them with his home-brewed wine in his own garden at the end of the day if they would carry the unbroken pieces of the old marbles along with them. As these marbles were not to be used in the rebuilding of the new bridge—they would clash in colour with sandstone—he thought it was better to move them away, and he didn't mind having them in his garden. It was a very heavy job, especially after a very heavy day's work. But it made the men more thirsty and Li Ming's wine taste much more drinkable.

In a few days the little wooden bridge, with old broken pieces of white marble as foundations under the water, and brand new red sandstones as supporting pillars, was completed and, with its reflection in the water, looked quite a nice picture from a distance. The name of the old bridge was the Bridge of the Mei Family. Naturally Li Ming thought it would never do to call it by its old name, since the Mei families had not contributed a single piece of cash for it. He would have liked to give a new name to it himself, but feared it would not be popular, and people would be liable to call it still by its old name. Since he had spent such a lot of money on it, he thought he had better spend a little more by giving a feast to His Excellency Mr. Wei,

the Prefect of Nanchangfu, and asking this great official to give a new name to the bridge. The publicity of the occasion would deeply impress the new name on everybody's mind.

An invitation letter, carefully written on a piece of red paper, was delivered to the Prefect, and as soon as his acceptance was marked under his name on the paper, the news began to spread by itself. Before the other guests were invited, all the people in the village and for scores of li around were talking about it. To make up a party, Li Ming had invited the Magistrate of the district, three other influential gentlemen from the city and his wife's brother, whose name was Wu. Adding his brother Li Kang and himself, the eight of them completed a square table. He did not want to invite the few more that would have made up a round table.

For several days Li Ming's whole household were busy preparing for the feast and the reception of the Prefect and other influential guests. He borrowed a cook and two well-trained servants from Madame Wu, his mother-in-law, to help on this important occasion. Everybody was getting more and more excited until the day came when the climax was reached. From the moment it was reported that the Prefect's sedan chair was approaching the village, Li Ming stood waiting outside his front gates for the arrival of the guest of honour. Making a deep, respectful bow, Li Ming thanked him for his condescension in coming and apologised for causing him discomfort by this strenuous long journey. The Prefect merely responded to the salute slightly and said casually that his sedan chair bearers had caused him no special discomfort.

A man of importance such as the Prefect generally has several luncheon and perhaps even more dinner engagements each day. Except when the acquaintance is very

slight, he always accepts all of them. He has therefore to run from one feast to another, never to sit at each table more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. To make a long journey to the country was a nuisance to His Excellency Mr. Wei. Scarcely had he sat down and sipped a mouthful of tea than he mentioned that he had to leave soon for other engagements. Li Ming therefore ordered the feast to be got ready while he conducted His Excellency to see the newly rebuilt bridge

A long string of six sedan chairs—with Li Ming at the very end in his brother-in-law's chair—approached the bridge. The Prefect, being at the head of the party, got down first. He must have been greatly moved by the good intention of the philanthropist who had given this bridge to the public, for he stood there staring at the bridge as if he could not believe his own eyes. Heaving a deep sigh, he exclaimed

“Good Heavens!”

Li Ming, hurrying forward and making another deep bow, repeated his request for a name. His Excellency, before coming, had thought of a number of marvellous names alluding either to the beauty or the majesty of the bridge. When he looked at this little bridge, his eyes began to turn away, until they alighted on the faces of the curious villagers who had gathered to watch the important occasion. He tried hard to think of an appropriate name, but his mind had almost become a blank. In a moment of desperation, he exclaimed once more:

“Good Heavens!”

Li Ming looked at him with alarm, but the alarmed expression which appeared on the face of his host saved the situation for His Excellency, who smiled charmingly and continued:

“Yes, this is a heavenly bridge and I think I will name it ‘The Bridge of Heaven’! Because of your generous gift

to the public, may Heaven bestow on you gold and silver, sons and grandsons!"

"Thank you very much indeed, Your Excellency" Li Ming was overjoyed.

"The Bridge of Heaven!" joined in the others "A very good name!"

"Now let us return to Mr. Li's house, for I have to go back to the city very soon."

The Prefect hurried back for the feast which by now was ready to be served. However, to the great annoyance of everybody, Li Kang, who, being Li Ming's brother and living in the same mansion, was considered "half a host", had not yet turned up. Early in the morning Li Ming had sent a silk gown and a satin jacket to his younger brother for him to be dressed up for the occasion. As Li Kang was reputed to be a late riser, his elder brother had not been surprised at having received no message of thanks from his younger brother. As repeated requests to get him over for the feast were unheeded, Li Ming decided that they had better start, so as not to keep His Excellency waiting.

His Excellency Mr. Wei had heard a great deal of Li Kang, not through Li Ming (who had always taken great care not to mention his unworthy younger brother to the great official and would not have included him among his guests were they not living so close together), but from his literary friends, among whom Li Kang was known as a talented man of letters and an excellent calligraphist. It happened that Mr. Wei considered himself a good writer and nothing pleased him more than people sending him paper and asking for his handwriting. Indeed, his calligraphy was very much sought after by the people of the Prefecture. Whenever they had anything to ask him, if they preluded the formal request by begging him to give them some specimen of his handwriting, the result would always be very satisfactory.

Though somewhat annoyed by Li Kang's absence, Mr. Wei decided that he must go to the next house to pay an informal call on one whom he termed his "fellow calligraphist". The idea greatly alarmed Li Ming, who, not daring to refuse any whim of a great man, at once sent Old Wang to run ahead to warn Li Kang about the Prefect's visit. Not waiting for a reply, the Prefect started at once and Li Ming was asked to lead the way. On arriving at Li Kang's forecourt by passing through the pass-door, Li Ming first coughed and then called aloud for his brother to come out to welcome the guest of honour. Unfortunately Li Kang must have been rather hard of hearing and nobody came forward. Li Kang's wife, from her inner room, replied that her husband was reading in his study. According to an old custom of China, the women-folk must not show themselves to visitors unless they are extremely intimate friends of the family.

Entering the front hall, Li Ming led Mr. Wei to the left and approached the study. Raising his voice, he said-

"Younger brother Kang, His Excellency the Prefect has condescended to call on you!"

Ushering the guest into the room first, he followed him in and was utterly scandalised to find that his good-for-nothing younger brother was taking an afternoon nap in the spare bed for a guest in the upper part of the study. In his wretched inner garments, Li Kang was lying there in a not altogether respectable posture with his face towards the back wall, and seemed to be fast asleep. Li Ming was on the point of losing his temper, but in front of the honoured guest had to check himself. Through his teeth he called his younger brother repeatedly, and the only reply he could hear was the faint snoring of the slumberer.

Li Ming wanted very much to swear but only looked at his guest with an uneasy smile. His guest wanted much more to swear and looked at his host with an even more

uneasy smile. While Li Ming was trying to apologise for the rude behaviour of his younger brother, the Prefect turned back and said that he hoped he would be pardoned for this intrusion.

The feast started immediately and the Prefect, after having tasted a little of the first main dish when it was served, got up, made his excuses to his host and the other guests and left for the city. The other guests stayed not much longer, and one by one they left in the order of their importance. The Magistrate took his leave just before Li Ming's brother-in-law. This official of the local government was an intimate friend of the host, and on hearing that the Prefect's physician had not prescribed any medicine at all for Li Ming's wife, offered to send his own doctor for the lady.

By the time the last four dishes were served only Mr. Wu and the host remained at the table. Rice and refreshments came at the same time and Mr. Wu, saying that he was thoroughly intoxicated with wine and filled with food, also expressed his thanks to Li Ming and said he had to go soon. Li Ming immediately ordered Old Wang to prepare and serve tea and also to see that Mr. Wu's chair bearers had had their meal and were ready. He also told the two servants from the Wu family to retire and have something to eat, so that they might go back to the city with their master.

When they were left alone in the middle chamber, Mr. Wu, who, being a man of temperate habits, was not in the least tipsy though he must have been forced to drink quite a lot, gave Li Ming some extremely good advice. Having heard that his sister was going to have another new physician, he was greatly concerned as to her health, and said

“My humble sister is like myself: though looking quite healthy, I am sorry to say she has an extremely weak

constitution. We have often been worried about her not having a son, and personally I think you ought to do something else than merely give her nasty medicine to take. Neither dried herbs nor pills nor powder can perform the miracle of giving a son to a woman who is incapable of having one. Think of your immense wealth. Can you bear to give it away to somebody else's brat after you two have attained a hundred years of life? Take a broader view of life, get a concubine and all will be well."

"Recently I mentioned this to your excellent sister, but unfortunately she won't see things from your brilliant point of view . . ."

"Of course my humble sister won't consent outright. But you needn't let her know at first. When you have already had a son, bring both the baby and the mother home and my humble sister will be the happiest woman in the world. Although my humble wife won't say anything if I take a concubine now, she is happier when I bring in a mother and son."

"I also want to make your excellent sister happy . . ."

"Of course! Now when you next come to the city, stay longer so that I will be able to show you around those quarters. I know of several very pretty girls whose mothers have asked me to look for a suitable husband for them. You can have the pick of them"

"It will cost quite a lot, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! A few hundred taels at most. Unless you want to keep two or three when you see they are all so good-looking!" Seeing Li Ming greatly interested, he went even further "Of course, the girls in Nanchang are far from first-rate. If you are really looking for beauties, come to Shanghai with me in the spring next year. I have some business to attend to in Shanghai in the summer and shall probably stay there until the hot days are gone. But anyhow, have a look at the local girls first."

Old Wang brought tea and hot towels in, and Mr. Wu changed the subject and wiped his face and hands. After a few sips of the tea, the two servants from his house came to report that the chair-bearers were waiting for his orders. He went into the inner part of the house to bid his sister good-bye, thanked Li Ming again and again, and departed for the city, where, he hinted, he hoped to see Li Ming soon.

It is said that when the guests are gone, the host feels at ease. With the completion of the bridge and the preparation of the feast, the whole household for several days past seemed to have been in a state of tension. Now that all the outsiders were gone, Li Ming heaved a deep sigh of relief and told his wife the new name the Prefect had given to the bridge, and also the recommendation of a new doctor by the Magistrate. Then he intended preparing his wife a little for future surprises by hinting vaguely about what her own brother had suggested, but she seemed to have something urgent to tell him and yet was very hesitant.

"I wanted to tell you earlier but have not been quite sure. I now think that there is no need for me to see any doctor or to take any medicine."

"What?" Li Ming could hardly believe his ears. "You don't mean that you are sure of it . . . ?"

"Yes." His wife looked on the ground. "It's three months now."

"Three months?"

"Yes!"

"Oh!" Tears came into his eyes. For a long time he was bereft of speech.

"Why are you so silent?"

"Had you told me this," replied Li Ming in a grumbling voice, "say, a month ago, then I needn't have wasted all the money on the bridge!"

"I wasn't sure until now. Besides, it has always been my wish that you should for once at least give something to charity. Perhaps Heaven will send us a son instead of a daughter!"

'A son!' thought Li Ming. 'A hundred taels for a son!'

He did not need to do much calculation this time. It is generally accepted that a daughter is worth a thousand taels and a son ten thousand. Hence girls are referred to as "thousand taels". Although Li Ming had recently been having sleepless nights because he had parted with something like a hundred taels in rebuilding the bridge and giving the feast, he now felt that it was an investment which would give him interest at ten thousand per cent. His only regret was that he had wasted so much money on that useless Doctor Tu, and he resolved to regard this as a lesson to him for having consulted an expensive doctor.

CHAPTER I

*"The earthling proposes,
The earthling opposes,
But Heaven disposes"*

No adjectives in any known language are adequate to describe the happiness of a man who is to become a father for the first time at the age of fifty. When Li Ming reflected upon his unexpected blessing, he actually lost his head and decided to give a splendid feast to all his villagers. For a man of strict economical principles, there must have been other reasons for this extravagance besides merely being happy and thankful. In fact there was something Li Ming wanted to make up. The last memorable occasion on which every mouth in the village had been fed with wine and meat was that of Li Ming's wedding. That was

more than twenty years ago. The old villagers remembered it with particular clarity because when, a few years later, Li Kang married, only the heads of the families were entertained, and the privileged, as well as the unprivileged, were highly dissatisfied. They said that the feast, like the house, was no longer what it used to be.

Li Ming regretted this with good reason. His wedding feast was given by his father, who was reputed to be very stingy in regard to his own comfort and expenses, but extremely generous to others. Therefore everybody had enjoyed the feast. But when Li Kang was about to marry, their father was lingering on his deathbed, and naturally Li Ming, being the eldest son, acted as the head of the family. In preparing his younger brother's wedding feast, he was blamed for once in his life for being extravagant. In a country dinner like this, the principal dish is always stewed pork and turnips. Though this is nominally called "stewed pork", it is a singularly adaptable dish which can be easily adjusted by mixing into it a greater or lesser quantity of turnips, in accordance with the meanness or generosity of the host. At his wedding feast Li Kang remarked jovially that his elder brother was a spendthrift by comparison with his father, in whose days a meat dish would have been quite inexpensively prepared by the addition of some turnips, whereas now that Li Ming was the master of the house he was actually so reckless that, in offering a dish of turnips to his guests, he even went to the length of adding a few lumps of pork to it.

At the old man's funeral not many more than a hundred villagers attended, and eighteen square tables fairly groaned with the weight of the loaded dishes. To everybody's surprise, the chief course was not the traditional stewed pork, but an entirely entrancing dish—namely, fried chicken with bamboo shoots. This certainly sounded

sumptuous, but it was evidently meant to be discussed rather than eaten. A chicken, according to the best informed circles, has five virtues. But the birds served seemed to have at least one more. They had that very rare virtue of having reached a truly remarkable age, a quality which, though much respected in human beings, is not altogether desirable in poultry.

Among those present, the coffin-bearers, who, according to the custom of the place, offered their services for nothing but this feast, seemed to be more resentful than the others. They passed the word around to investigate into the number of wing tips, and found, to their profound admiration, that an expert cook had succeeded in serving eighteen tables with a single bird, of course most carefully cut and distributed, and garnished with a sufficiency of bamboo shoots. They declared that this chicken had thus acquired a further virtue: namely, it had achieved the record feat of covering eighteen tables in its last flight to the other world. As for the bamboo shoots, they, too, were in keeping with the chief dainty. Had they been spared the process of cooking, they could have been rendered much more useful by being made into articles of furniture.

Since the villagers had been so mean as to give no praise for their two splendid feasts, Li Ming had decided not to entertain them any more, whatever happened. But now that he felt so blissful over the prospective increase in his family, he shed his principles and promised to invite all the village to the feast when his child was born.

Naturally the expectant mother was no less but even more happy than the father. Furthermore, she felt as if a heavy stone had been removed from her heart. She thought that this would mean an end to the nasty medicine and incessant prayers. But physicians of the worst type never ceased coming, one after another, and

she was made to take some sort of potion almost every day. These things, it was said, would either stabilise the pregnancy, or else ensure that the unborn child would be a boy and not a mere girl. It was impossible for her to pretend to take the stuff and then throw it away, because when the medicine was paid for—and the so-called doctors always wanted cash when they supplied the stuff they prescribed—Li Ming would never leave her for a second until she had swallowed it before his eyes

This and her endless pilgrimages to temples were at last put a stop to when she really fell sick, and then luckily a sensible doctor was consulted. He said that unless she gave up taking all this rubbish that masqueraded as medicine, and stopped dashing about all over the country on strenuous journeys—for both were fatal to pregnant women, and especially to one of her age and weight—such folly would undoubtedly result in a miscarriage. These words had immediate effect. But the poor woman's hard days were far from being over. From that day onwards she was never allowed to eat or drink anything other than certain specific things which some doctor had made a list of, and was forbidden the slightest movement. The bondmaids were ordered to dress and undress her.

The critical day drew near. Li Ming had engaged in advance a midwife who lived in the Village of the Mei Family's Ferry. He preferred this woman, who was two miles away, to the midwife of his own village because, he said, she was more reliable. But there was another reason. Three years ago, when Li Kang's wife was giving birth to a child, they had had to go to the next village to get this woman because the local midwife was seriously ill. That was her first professional visit to the Village of the Li Families, and she made a very good first impression by congratulating Li Kang on the prospect of being blessed with a noble son. Indeed, a few minutes later it was

proved that she was right. Afterwards she said that she had magical charms guaranteed to bring sons instead of daughters to her clients. Nobody believed her, and least of all Li Kang, the father. But Li Ming was rather impressed by her feat, having previously taken for granted that his brother was sure to have a girl.

It is customary in Chinese families to invite an experienced and successful mother, preferably a near relative, to stay with the wife when she is expecting her firstborn. In the case of Li Ming's wife, they had no need to look for such a person. Their sister-in-law, Li Kang's wife, who lived practically in the same house, would be the ideal companion and adviser. But Li Ming did not want to trouble her. The next choice was, of course, his mother-in-law, Madame Wu, who, living in the city, was within twenty li from them. She was also well qualified to act in this capacity, because she was the mother of a daughter, that is, Li Ming's wife, and a son who was much younger, being only thirty-three.

Of course Li Ming realised her shortcomings. A mother who, however successful, had not heard an infant's cry for more than thirty years, could hardly be compared with one who had had a son only three years ago. Besides, a mother-in-law is seldom a popular figure in the house of her son-in-law, and the making of preparations for her stay would involve unnecessary fuss—and above all, extra expense—while on the other hand Li Kang's wife could come and see her sister-in-law at any odd hour through one of the pass-doors. Li Ming fully realised this, and he had no particular love for his mother-in-law. But still, after a careful calculation of the extra budget, which almost drove him crazy, he decided with resignation that he would prefer to have his mother-in-law.

To introduce Madame Wu as a mother-in-law is to do her an injustice. She was, indeed, a very charming small

lady with a commanding personality. She was the best of wives and a model mother, for she utterly despised her husband when he was alive, greatly missed him when he was dead, and loved her children to distraction. Her husband had a very gentle disposition, so she said he had no backbone. As their children took exactly after their father, she regarded them as helpless and nearly killed them with her motherly kindness. For her son-in-law she also had reserved a special place in her heart, but soon perceived that she could not warm Li Ming even by enfolding him in her bosom.

She readily accepted the invitation to stay for a month or so with her daughter in the country, though she said she was very reluctant to leave her son and young daughter-in-law even for a short time. So, in the early afternoon on the 12th day of the 3rd moon of the 6th year of the reign of the Emperor Kwang Hsu (1880), Madame Wu, in a big sedan chair carried by four bearers, at the head of a long procession, arrived at the Village of the Li Families.

The visit of a mother-in-law from the city to a house in the country, though the distance is only a few miles, is an important piece of family history. As Madame Wu's chair approached the home, Li Ming made a sign to Old Wang, who immediately set off a string of small fire-crackers to give her a hearty welcome. Evidently Li Ming must have made an unusually good bargain when buying these fire-crackers. As Old Wang threw them on the ground, instead of the deafening, loud cracking sound they should have produced, nothing was heard but a tiny plop as the whole bunch touched the pavement. After a moment's awkward pause, during which everybody felt the world was at a standstill, Li Ming ordered Old Wang to relight the crackers. Hesitatingly Old Wang went forward and timidly picked them up. Once more he lit them,

and this time a few half-hearted cracks came forth. The sound was rather damping.

When Li Ming perceived that Madame Wu had brought Blue Pearl, her personal maid, and Chung Fu, a manservant, with her, he began to realise that his previous budget was quite wrong, and now he had to accept something more than he had bargained for. He murmured his welcome to Madame Wu, and it sounded even more damping than the half-hearted crackers. But his wife was overjoyed to see her mother, and while the women were exchanging their innermost sentiments in the inner part of the house, he stayed in the court-yard to examine the things which his mother-in-law had brought him

To his considerable satisfaction, Li Ming discovered that, besides numerous articles for her personal comfort, Madame Wu had brought with her quite a lot of clothing and other things for the baby. As he was carefully estimating the lowest possible value of these things, he noticed that most of them, such as coats, hats and shoes, were expressly made for a boy. He felt very grateful to his mother-in-law for being so thoughtful and at once ordered Double Blessing and Great Happiness to go to the kitchen and chop some firewood. As Old Chang was always busy in the garden, it was the duty of the bondmaids to make and serve tea. Li Ming's economic policy was not to make tea before guests arrived, not to make a fire before tea was required and not to chop the firewood before the last lot was all gone. This policy might cause a little delay, but it was a definite guarantee against the slightest waste.

After a quick examination of the arrangement of the house, Madame Wu told her daughter that she wanted to make some changes. Li Ming was to take his things into the guest room on the other side of the middle chamber and to make his headquarters there. His wife was to move

into the inner room hitherto occupied by the bondmaids. Madame Wu was to keep company with her daughter in that room. The original bedroom of Li Ming and his wife was now to be occupied by Blue Pearl, her personal maid, so that if Madame Wu wanted anything at night, Blue Pearl would be near at hand. Double Blessing and Great Happiness had to set up their beds in the little back room. Chung Fu was to have Old Wang's room, and Old Wang had to find another place to set up his bed. In spite of Li Ming's strong protests, Madame Wu finally had her way. The house immediately became chaotic and every room was virtually upside down. They busied themselves all the afternoon. When the evening meal was over, all went to their respective rooms and rearranged things to their own taste and liking. By the time they had finished it was nearly midnight.

Then Madame Wu gave orders to Blue Pearl to prepare supper. On hearing the word "supper", Li Ming gasped. This was an extravagance of the city which he had forgotten to take into consideration when preparing his budget. As a protest he remarked meaningfully that country people such as he himself would feel ill if they ate anything after the first watch of the night, and immediately bade his mother-in-law good night.

Many years had passed since Li Ming's wife had had such a good and thoroughly enjoyable supper, and perhaps she had eaten a little more than she should have done. Or else it was because she had been moving about too much and was over-excited by her mother's arrival that she lay awake in her newly made bed for a long time. When at last she fell asleep she had a nightmare. Soon she felt a sharp pain inside. By daybreak all the symptoms pointed in one direction: the midwife must be sent for. While Old Wang was ordered to go to the Village of the

Mei Family's Ferry, Li Ming's wife was screaming the house down. She was a big woman, and consequently could make a big noise. Li Kang, who always liked to enjoy a moment of tranquility in his bed in the morning, found her loud and sharp yells a little disturbing. He asked his wife to go over and see if she could help.

Madame Wu told the visitor that she had the situation well in hand and that nothing humanly possible had been left undone. In fact she had given, hours ago, a long list of orders to the maids for the benefit of both mother and child. Li Kang's wife saw that she was not welcome and had to retire crestfallen. Soon an odious smell of something burning filled the whole house and permeated into every corner. Li Kang got up and came out of his room to inquire where this disagreeable smell came from. To his amazement he found his elder brother's part of the house full of loathsome smoke. Fearing something there was on fire, he hurried over and asked Li Ming what was the matter.

"There is nothing the matter," Li Ming replied calmly. But all was not right, for evidently he himself could not bear it, and was standing in the court-yard to avoid the smell of the smoke.

"But something is burning, and the smell will do a great deal of harm to my elder sister-in-law."

"My mother-in-law said that the smoke of burning cock's feather will drive away evil spirits. As we are expecting the arrival of the child at any moment, it is better to be on the safe side."

"On the safe side!" Li Kang nearly lost his temper. "And when did the evil spirits come to this house? I did not know they had arrived!"

"My younger sister-in-law shouldn't have entered the room-of-the-happy-event this morning!" rejoined Li Ming bluntly. "As she came from the other part of the

house, she might have brought undesirable elements with her."

"I have no objection to other people's silly belief in superstition so long as they are doing no harm to anybody. But this dreadful smell, which you think will drive away evil spirits, will also drive living people to the other world! Have you no consideration for the poor mother who is going through her labour?"

"Don't talk nonsense, younger brother! Though you have read all kinds of rubbishy books and pretend to understand medicine, you know nothing about these matters!"

"The midwife, with her experience, ought to know better. Why didn't she put a stop to this nonsense?"

"The midwife hasn't come yet. I've sent Old Chang to see what's happened to Old Wang, who went hours ago."

"Better get the local midwife first, in case anything has gone amiss with the other woman."

"The local midwife is utterly useless. We'll wait for the one from the Mei Family's Ferry."

"But the mother can't wait, and the child won't wait! Quick, for Heaven's sake, send for the local midwife immediately!"

"Why are you so anxious that we should get the local woman? Have you been promised a commission for her? Can't you mind your own business?"

Nothing infuriated Li Kang more than any accusation connected with money. He was so much hurt by these remarks that he said angrily:

"All right, all right. I will not bother about other people's business even if I see them dying!"

Country people are generally very superstitious, and Li Ming was one of the most superstitious. Words referring to "death" must never be mentioned on certain important days or auspicious occasions. Li Kang's utter-

ances were regarded as malicious. Li Ming was furious.

"You are talking rubbish, you good-for-nothing spend-thrift!"

There would have been more heated words had not the extraordinary good news come in the nick of time Double Blessing rushed out from the inner chamber and shouted in excitement

"Congratulations, my master! We have now a young master—a young master!"

Li Ming was overjoyed. Leaving his brother, he took out and lit a big bunch of fire crackers—ten times as long as the bunch used to welcome his mother-in-law—and threw it out of the front gate into the street. When it went off with a series of deafening reports, Li Ming felt that he had had a better bargain than he thought, though he had paid much more for it than he would usually have done. Money never goes the wrong way.

"Stop the fire crackers! Stop the fire crackers!" Madame Wu's voice was heard calling out loudly and angrily, and these words were relayed to him by Great Happiness. "Who told them to let off fire crackers without my orders? Stop them at once!"

The new father was thunderstruck. Knowing instinctively that something must be wrong, he rushed out of the gates and stamped his feet on the bunch of fire crackers. He picked up the remaining half and took it into the house. On entering the middle chamber he perceived his unworthy younger brother standing there and quarrelling with his mother-in-law, who was still in the inner room.

"It's utterly useless trying to force any of your rubbishy medicine down his throat. You have to shake him and slap him incessantly on the back!" Li Kang was shouting desperately.

"How can you shake and slap a tiny darling like this? Do you want to kill him?" stormed Madame Wu

"If he is not breathing, that's the only way to save him. I don't want to kill him, but you will have a stone-dead baby soon if you insist on your medical nonsense!"

"I know how to bring up babies, for I am a mother! I don't need any interference from rude men," declared Madame Wu at the top of her voice

"But you'll have a dead baby to bring up . . ."

Li Ming could bear this no longer.

"Shut up! You horrible beast! You simply wish my baby to die! Get out of here before I lose my temper!"

Anyone could see that Li Ming had already lost his temper. Li Kang realised that though those who would not take advice were fools, those who insisted upon giving it when they knew it was not wanted were even bigger ones. He withdrew to his own quarters without further ado.

But the quarrel in the house went on even after Li Kang's departure. Madame Wu found fault with everything and everybody. When nobody dared to come near her, she rated them for not doing so. She cursed everybody and everything—from the master of the house to a cup, a spoon or a piece of string. The only difference from the previous moment was that now she did all the quarrelling by herself, without an opponent.

The baby was dead beyond doubt, but she would not give up hope. After she had tried all her medical cures, she had recourse to moxa burning and the "divine needle". These treatments were performed for a considerable length of time, but, as might be expected, no miracle happened. In the meantime, the suffering mother continued to cry in great pain.

At last the midwife turned up with Old Wang, Old Chang and Chung Fu, who had also been sent to look for her. Evidently nobody had told her the sad news for, following her old custom, she made her bows to Li Ming

and congratulated him on the good fortune of being the father of a coming nobleman. Li Ming shouted angrily

“Throw her out! Throw her out!”

“No! No!” Madame Wu came to her rescue. “Let us see what she can do. Perhaps she has some special treatment for the boy in a case like this.”

“I said it was going to be a boy!” declared the woman with amazement, apprehension and joy. She thought Li Ming was angry with her simply because she was late. “I knew it was . . .”

“Shut up, stupid woman! Come in and see it first,” commanded Madame Wu.

The woman went into the room, and Li Ming demanded from the servants the cause of this fatal delay. He learned that they had been unable to find the woman at her house because she had already gone out on a similar job somewhere near her own village. They had had to make inquiries. In fact they had called upon practically every prospective mother in the village, including some who said their motherhood was still but a possibility. Their search had been entirely fruitless until they had met with a boy who told them that while gathering pebbles on the bank of the river very early in the morning, he had seen the woman going on board a fishing-boat moored near the Bridge of Heaven.

Being a firm believer in astrology and fate, Li Ming realised that the fisherman’s child would have been born at the same hour, day, month and year as his own child. He was curious.

“Is the fisherman’s baby alive?”

“Oh, yes,” they replied in chorus.

“A boy or a girl?” Li Ming thought perhaps the sex made a difference.

“A boy,” answered Old Wang.

"No, a girl," Old Chang put in "The father was very unhappy. It must be a girl."

Li Ming looked at Chung Fu for confirmation, but the reply was not helpful.

"I seem to have heard that it was a boy, but I didn't bother to make sure"

"Yes, a boy," replied Old Wang. "The father was miserable because he could not afford to have a baby."

"Are you sure it is a boy?" demanded Li Ming. But nobody was sure, when they saw the master attached so much importance to the accuracy of their statements. No wonder Li Ming was angry. "You are a pack of useless fools!"

"Perhaps I can go there and find out for you." Old Wang was always willing to give satisfaction.

Li Ming looked undecided, when his tactless brother had actually the audacity to come into the middle chamber again. But Li Kang had entirely forgotten their little quarrel, for he now said in his usual good-humoured way: "Yes, four fools gathered together! Why do you keep on asking these poor half-wits instead of referring it to the authority who is in the house?"

"Do you mean you are the authority?"

"No! But why not ask the midwife? She can hardly help knowing, I should imagine!"

'Of course,' thought Li Ming 'Why hadn't I thought of that?' He felt even angrier with his brother than with the servants. Li Kang noticed the look of unwelcome and explained.

"I am not interested in what you want to know. I have come to tell the midwife to concentrate her attention on the poor mother rather than waste her time over a dead child. Your excellent mother-in-law still wants to try the art of resurrection!"

Saying the last of his words very loudly so that the

women in the inner room could overhear him, he retired to his own quarters once more. Li Ming dismissed the servants and summoned the midwife for information

"A boy! A very big boy! I always bring boys," said the woman.

"Are they really very badly off?"

"They are floating fishing people who live in their boat from hand to mouth. They are on their way to the big Po-Yang Lake, for this part of the river did not yield them enough fish to feed them. Heaven is really blind! Such a wretchedly poor fisherman is blessed with a bonny son, while here in this magnificent mansion filled with gold and silver, the young master would pass away, leaving behind him a life of prosperity which has been waiting for him. Well, well, I'm sure I'll come again this time next year to receive a more fortunate baby master!"

When the midwife was called into the room again, Li Ming paced up to his study and paced back into the middle chamber, thinking hard and murmuring to himself. He wondered why the fisherman who had built no bridge was blessed with a son, whilst he, who gave so much for charity, had only a dead child. He would like to pull that wretched bridge down. The great hope which he had been nursing for months was now gone. He kept on saying:

"What an awful day, an awful day!"

He walked out of his house and looked gloomily at the sky. The sunlight faded more and more, and finally was gone altogether. Soon he found black clouds covering the full sky. The more he thought of his lost son, the more he envied the fisherman. Walking out of his village, he stood on a high spot in the road and fixed his gaze in the direction of the Bridge not very far away. On clear summer days it was possible to see the Bridge and the

Village of the Mei Family's Ferry somewhat indistinctly. The yellow sandbanks of the river would shine in the sun. But on a day like this he could see nothing at all. Sauntering along the road, he soon found himself approaching the Bridge. This work of charity which used to look very pretty and artistic to him, now appeared miserable to him and he loathed the sight of it. He heard the sound of distant thunder and wished it might be destroyed by a thunderbolt.

Catching sight of the fisherman's solitary boat which was moored under the Bridge, he suddenly came to a decision. He had money which the fisherman lacked, and the fisherman had the baby who was a burden to its parents but exactly his own heart's desire. It was probable that some kind of arrangement could be made to the satisfaction of both parties. He carefully rehearsed his words for driving a good bargain with the fisherman, and went down the bank and straight to the boat. Before going on board he made up his mind, for a start, not to pay more than ten thousand pieces of cash for the boy. If they were really as hard-up as the midwife made out, he could probably get him for eight. And if he pretended not to be very keen, he might persuade them to accept six. Nevertheless, it would do no harm to try to find some fault with the baby, and offer only four. After all, he must begin the deal by saying two.

Thus determined, he went on board and pretended to congratulate the happy parents on the increase in their family. Exchange of greetings and remarks on the difficulties of the time speedily led to the subject Li Ming had in mind. He tactfully informed the fisherman of his intention and of the conditions of the sale. He concluded his long and carefully prepared speech by saying:

"It will be a great relief to you and your wife and a marvellous opportunity for your child—remember, the

boy is, after all, your flesh and blood though you are to have no claim on him—and I'll . . . I'll . . . I think I could afford to give you two thousand pieces of cash . . . but no more. This is my firm and last offer!"

He searched the improvised little cabin of the boat with his sharp eyes, and knew the fisherman and his wife had practically no other worldly belongings except the baby and the boat. The mother was lying on some hard boards in the upper part of the cabin and a very much patched but well laundered sheet covered her and the child. He wondered why they did not shiver with cold on such a chilly morning with so few bedclothes for protection. He dared not catch the woman's eyes, for he thought women were always in the way where business was concerned. And he knew that her eyes were full of tears. Heavens! If she started to sob aloud he would have to give more. He looked appealingly at the husband, and at last decided to raise his offer five hundred each time.

The fisherman had been surprised at the condescension of this rich man in calling upon him and was now amazed to hear such an unexpected offer. He could not find words for an appropriate answer.

L_i Ming took it as a sign of disagreement. The best policy in bargaining is never to increase your offer too quickly but to wait for your opponent to commit himself to a figure. L_i Ming took his time and said leisurely:

"Two thousand pieces of cash is a great deal of money. Even by working hard, one rarely earns such a big sum in several months' time. I offer you so much because I want you to sail far away from here immediately and never come near this neighbourhood again. Your presence here will do no good either to yourself or to the child. I hope you'll see my point."

The fisherman looked at his wife and L_i Ming turned

his eyes away in despair. But the woman readily gave her consent in silence and the husband said—

“You are indeed a great philanthropist to offer to help us in our distress. We shall be eternally grateful to you and may Heaven bless you. Of course whatever you say we accept. Allow me to thank you on behalf of the child.”

With these words, he made repeated bows to Li Ming.

Returning the salute uneasily, Li Ming felt wretched and was utterly ashamed of himself. He was ashamed not because he had not offered more, but because he had as good as thrown away two thousand pieces of good cash. Why hadn’t he given the matter a little more careful reflection?

He now clearly saw that girls, as a rule, were worth more than boys. Girls were more useful and therefore in greater demand than boys, who were hardly saleable. As he had just lost a son, and was looking urgently for one to fill his place, it had only occurred to him that persons with sons to sell were extremely rare, whereas he ought to have realised that prospective buyers of sons were scarcer still.

But Li Ming was an honourable man. A bargain made was a bargain to be kept. He paid the parents the two thousand in notes without flinching in the least. When the fisherman took the baby, who was wrapped up in a piece of rag, and handed it to the philanthropist, the mother sobbed as though her heart would break. Li Ming was glad to get it over and leave the boat in a great hurry. As it was now raining, the father gave Li Ming a waterproof hat made of bamboo leaves. Standing on the bank, he watched the fisherman untie the rope and row downstream. While the boat gradually disappeared, Li Ming picked his steps homewards. Rain was drizzling down but the sky was still dark and the whole country was wrapped in silence except for the sound of his own footsteps, and

that of the leaves by the roadside wafted by a very gentle breeze.

On arriving at home, Li Ming was astonished to find that everybody seemed to know that he had acquired a son. Old Wang was the first to congratulate him and one by one all the servants he met on his way towards the middle chamber made their bows to him and said the same thing. He looked at the little bundle he was holding and wondered why everybody knew at once that it was a son he had brought. The piece of rag was quite wet. He had been walking against the wind and the waterproof hat had only kept his own head dry.

Madame Wu came out of the room and exclaimed

"Congratulations, Ming! I am so glad that you are the happy father of a son at last!" Before Li Ming had time to ask her anything, she beckoned Blue Pearl to bring forward a big bundle, wrapped carefully with a cotton-padded blanket, in which a tiny baby was sleeping. "Where have you been all the while? We looked everywhere for you and they said you had probably gone out. What have you been doing in this rain? You are thoroughly wet. And what is that in your hand?"

Ignoring her question, Li Ming hurried to ask her.

"Has the baby revived?"

"No! Your wife gave birth to twins. The first one died as you know, but the second one was born at ten o'clock."

Blue Pearl brought the second twin to him and he now realised that because his wet bundle was small and the way he carried it was not at all the orthodox way of carrying a child, nobody thought it was a baby. He held it lower and put it slantingly, so that the child's head rested on his arm. Loosening the upper end of the bundle a little, he compared the fisherman's boy with his own. They both looked horrible, with wrinkled faces and tightly closed eyes. But while his own baby was sleeping peace-

fully, the fisherman's son, who was much bigger, opened his ugly mouth and began to howl loudly.

Madame Wu was horrified and demanded what was the meaning of this.

"I bought this baby to replace my lost one, not knowing that another was coming . . ."

"Atisho! Atisho!" sneezed his own child, who also began to cry in a sweet little voice.

"The chilly atmosphere around the wet bundle has given my precious little one a cold. Bring the young master in at once, Blue Pearl!" Turning to Li Ming, Madame Wu said sternly: "I don't know where you picked up that bastard, but now that you know you have a noble son of your own, send it back where it belongs!"

"No! It's too late now. His parents are gone. I have let myself in for it."

Li Ming was remorseful. He was like a dumb man who had swallowed a bitter pill by mistake. He wished he could explain, but had to be silent and take all the blame.

It is the custom in that part of China for the happy family to announce the birth of a child by sending to their friends, neighbours and relatives what are called *hsı-tan* or "eggs of happiness". These are chicken's or duck's eggs, dyed red, and the number of the eggs given indicates the sex of the new-born. Any odd number, generally from three to eleven, according to the means of the parents, shows it is a boy, while an even number, from two to ten, says it is a girl. As Madame Wu suggested that her grandchild should be disguised as a girl in order to escape the jealousy of evil spirits, orders were given that ten red *hsı-tan* were to be sent to each family. Her son-in-law made no objection to this number because he intended them to signify two boys, five for each boy. He announced that the fisherman's son was to replace his first-born, and to be known as Ta-Shiao-Ya, or the "first

young master", while his own son was Erh-Shiao-Ya, or the "second young master".

When the messengers were sent to distribute *hsı-tan* around the village, they had several different versions of the news to spread. According to the servants of Madame Wu, whose instructions they followed, it was a girl, and according to Li Ming's servants, who had to obey their master, they were twin boys—the first one having revived after all. But these messengers each gave freely their own versions, which were different from the two official announcements. But when it was known that two wet nurses had been engaged, this left no doubt that twin babies had been born in Li Ming's family. People praised the justice of Heaven and said that this was due to the rebuilding of the bridge. The news became the talk of the district and numerous visitors came to see the Bridge of Heaven.

A blind fortune-teller was brought from the city to examine the nativities of the children, for both Madame Wu and Li Ming were believers in fortune-telling by one's "eight characters", which is the hour, the day, the month and the year of one's birth. The blind man said that the first young master's nativity was a very strange one. Being born at eight o'clock in the morning of the 13th of the 3rd moon of the 6th year of Kwang Hsu, it was actually the hour of the dragon, the day of the dragon, the month of the dragon and the year of the dragon. Suddenly the man asked

"Was it pouring with rain in the country yesterday morning, sir?"

"Yes," answered Li Ming. "But why?"

"The first young master is a golden dragon coming from Heaven, sir. Without water, sir, he couldn't possibly live, sir. He must have been born when water was pouring down from Heaven, sir. At eight o'clock yester-

day morning, sir, it must have been pouring with rain here, sir."

Li Kang was also there, and he regarded fortune-tellers as impostors. To tease the man he said.

"I remember that at eight o'clock it was still fine. When the fire-crackers were thrown on the ground, the pavements were perfectly dry, otherwise they wouldn't have gone off."

"You were wrong," put in Madame Wu, who didn't want gossip to spread. "When Ming came in he was wet through."

"I am never mistaken, sir. It couldn't be dry, sir. Unless water was everywhere around the boy, sir, he couldn't have been born alive, sir!"

Li Kang looked askance at his elder brother.

Li Ming decided to let it pass. He knew it did not start to rain until several hours after the child was born. His own child had died, and the fisherman's baby was actually surrounded by water. He was so much impressed by this blind man that he wanted to know what the boy would do in the future, and when was he to die?

"A dragon will naturally crumble the Heavens and shake the earth, sir, and die when he arrives at a place where there should be water, but actually without a drop of water, sir."

"What place is that?" Li Kang asked.

"Heaven alone can tell you, sir."

"How about the second young master's nativity?" Madame Wu was more concerned with her real grandson than the fisherman's boy.

"Ten o'clock was the hour of the snake, sir! He has a dragon's head, but a snake's tail, sir. He'll have a much easier life, sir."

"And the end?" Li Kang asked jokingly

"Die in a hole, sir."

"I don't understand that."

"Neither do I, sir. But such is Heaven's decree, sir. Time will explain to us, sir."

L_i Ming rewarded the fortune-teller much more handsomely than he would usually have done.

Chung Fu was sent to the city to invite Madame Wu's son and daughter-in-law to partake of the feast to be given on the third day of the birth. Such an occasion is called "The Third Bath" of the baby. When he came back to the country, he brought a message of congratulation to the lucky parents and a letter to Madame Wu. It was written by the daughter-in-law, and in it she told Madame Wu that her husband had that very morning left for Shanghai on urgent business. Not only did she regret that she could not join in this happy occasion, but also she wished her mother-in-law to return to the city as soon as possible. She, being an inexperienced young woman, was quite incapable of coping with the heavy burden of a big house all by herself.

With two babies to be looked after, Madame Wu found it impossible to leave her daughter alone for the time being. As L_i Ming had to go into the city from time to time, she asked him to regard her house as his and make it his headquarters in the city so that he could help her young daughter-in-law whenever there arose any difficulty. This L_i Ming readily consented to do, for there were times when he had to be in town for two or three days, and his mother-in-law's offer of hospitality saved him a lot of hotel expenses.

The feast given on the Third Bath of the babies was attended by everybody in the Village of the L_i Families. As Madame Wu was running the whole business, L_i Ming had no chance of economising. The villagers brought with them practically valueless presents for the babies, and in return were genuinely treated to a rich banquet.

Li Ming said that he didn't mind the money wasted on feeding these rustics, but he was dead against extravagance on principle. Rather than stay at home and see the hungry crowd devouring his fare, he decided to keep away from his home by lingering in the city for several days in order to forget this heart-breaking way of throwing money away.

Li Kang, being well known for his utter uselessness except in literary matters, was asked to give the boys their names. He decided that the bigger boy was to be called Ta Tung, which means "Great Harmony". It was fashioned after the name of his own son, Ta Yu, which means "Great Harvest". To the younger boy he gave the name of "Shiao Ming," which could either be explained as "Little Brightness" or as "Ming (Brightness) the Younger", indicating that this was the son of Li Ming.

It has been said that a child without parents is cared for by Heaven. This was true at least in the case of Ta Tung, to whom nobody paid any attention, and even his nurse suffered for his sake. For instance, while the two nurses had to be equally treated as regards food and clothes, the one who looked after Shiao Ming generally found eggs or pieces of meat hidden under the rice at the bottom of her bowl: Ta Tung's nurse wondered why her comrade was always smiling when eating her rice.

This was only fair. For Shiao Ming was a delicate child. He ought to have better care and more nourishing milk. From the day of his birth, Shiao Ming suffered from a mild cold, caught from Ta Tung, whose wet rag was the cause of the mischief. Shiao Ming's nurse was a very dutiful woman, and in spite of suffering from constant indigestion, she never neglected the child for a moment. No matter where she went, she always carried Shiao Ming with her. Of course his mother and his grand-

mother also liked to fondle him in their arms. Even the maidservants and the bondmaids doted on him. His slight coughs or sneezes always brought a number of doctors to the house, and not a day would pass without some member of the family making an offering to the gods for the protection and guardianship of the little darling. He was given all sorts of tonics and underwent numerous kinds of treatment during all the hours of the day and many hours of the night. Yet all these tonics, treatments and prayers had very little result. The little darling was as thin as a skeleton, whereas the other child was as strong as an ox.

As Shiao Ming required so much care, Madame Wu had to stay in the country much longer, especially when Li Ming happened to be so very busy in town. Since he frequently stayed at her house, she felt she need not worry about her own home and became quite settled down at her daughter's house.

When the babies were a month old, a small feast of celebration was given. The twins by now looked quite different, Ta Tung being twice as big as Shiao Ming. All the visitors knew the inside story of the twins and most of them mistook the chubby child for the real son of the family. Thinking they could not possibly be misled by so striking a resemblance to his mother and that the skeleton could be no other than the child of the starved fishwife, they all agreed in finding the bigger boy infinitely more lovable than the skinny one, and hoped that they had said the right thing. Li Kang was the only one who enjoyed the joke heartily.

Madame Wu stayed over the Dragon Boat Festival, which falls on the 5th of the 5th moon every year, and then over the Mid-Autumn Festival, which falls on the 15th of the 8th moon. Indeed, she would have stayed over the New Year had not her son returned at the end of the

9th moon, when she was obliged to return home. Luckily, after that Li Ming was not so busy in town and never stayed away from his home overnight. So everything just fitted in all right.

Early in the spring of the following year Li Ming made preparations to invite his mother-in-law to come and stay in the country once more for the important occasion of the children's first birthday. To his great astonishment, Madame Wu expressed her regret at being unable to stay in the country at all, though she consented to come just for the day. Her daughter-in-law was expecting a baby at the end of the 5th moon, and therefore she could not leave her during the next few months. This good news was also a great surprise to everyone. Nobody had ever supposed that the "prodigal of the Wu family", as Mr. Wu was nicknamed by all his relatives, could possibly have a child.

On his first birthday anniversary, a child in China has a solemn duty to perform. He has to choose for himself his profession. This traditional ceremony is performed by offering the child a big tray, on which most of the instruments of the seventy-two noble professions are placed; and anything that he picks up from it is regarded as indicative of his future career. Though an extremely fallible method, it sometimes happens that the thing chosen actually coincides with one's calling, and it is always a very popular custom among parents. The reason is perhaps this. When the child is given a variety of things to choose from, he generally picks up the article he likes by instinct.

Moreover, a carpenter's child, who has been used for many months to seeing his father using a saw or a plane, would most probably select such articles, whereas the son of a merchant would perhaps fancy an abacus on which he has seen his father making calculations every night. When the child is grown up, if he follows the profession

he chose some twenty years ago, it will be recalled by those who saw the ceremony, and then the news will be spread everywhere. But if his profession has nothing to do with the toy he fancied on his first birthday, then of course nobody will take any notice of it.

When on his first birthday Shiao Ming was offered a tray full of inviting articles, Madame Wu, who had been in the house for a few hours, already had the situation well in hand. She had carefully examined every article on the tray, and had excluded all the things belonging to what she thought undesirable professions. A volume of Confucian Classics, wrapped up, by Madame Wu's urgent orders, in a piece of bright red silk, therefore occupied the most prominent place on the tray, and beside it lay a big brush pen.

The boy pushed aside the book, and unwittingly picked up the pen. Everybody cheered and said Shiao Ming would be a brilliant scholar and consequently a great man. Suddenly the nurse, who was holding him in her arms, screamed. They found that the boy had, while unobserved, dropped the pen and picked up a paper knife and was stabbing the nurse violently. Luckily it was a very blunt knife, and it was forcibly taken away from him amid his loud shrieks and cries.

"Shiao Ming is a better butcher than scholar!" exclaimed his uncle Li Kang innocently. "Now, let us see what my Ta Tung is going to choose."

He called his foster nephew by the endearing introductory word "my" because the boy was his declared favourite. Hoping to supervise the ceremony himself, he took the tray from the mother with the intention of offering it to the boy. But when he scanned the various articles, he found that many things which were usually included were missing, and he announced loudly that this was hardly fair.

He told Double Blessing to fetch one or two farming implements of his own, and very shortly she returned carrying a big hoe and a sickle of formidable shape from his house. Everybody laughed, but he insisted that the sickle at least was small enough to be put in the tray. It was put there, and he then bore off the tray to his nephew. Ta Tung, without hesitation, took the sickle and brandished it happily Li Kang smiled triumphantly and said:

"Good, good! My Ta Tung! Of all things, you have chosen my sickle! You will make a splendid farmer, like your uncle!"

At first all those present were much surprised by the boy's strange choice, but when they heard Li Kang's reference to himself as a splendid farmer, the house was nearly rocked down by peals of uproarious laughter.

Madame Wu kept her word this time, and went back to the city that very afternoon, directly the feast was over. Less than a month afterwards a messenger came from the city with a small basket of red eggs. These he distributed equally between Li Ming and Li Kang. They were happily surprised to know that the child was born on the 2nd of the 4th moon, nearly two months before its time. They counted the eggs and found each had received ten. They asked the messenger to convey their thanks and congratulations to his mistress, and requested her not to be disheartened, for there was a very well-known proverb

*"The mother of a crowd of boys
Will always have one girl to start,
And bring her up and wed her off
Before she matches the first boy's heart."*

It appeared that Madame Wu was only too ready to follow this advice, though she followed it, perhaps, too

literally. She sent for her son-in-law, who called on her as soon as he could. To his consternation he found that she wanted to betroth her infant granddaughter, who was called Lotus Fragrance, to his son. Though most people would have considered this an honour to the Li family, and though a betrothal arranged when both parties are still infants is not at all unusual—many engagements are agreed upon before either party is even born—Li Ming, for some reason unknown to the others, was extremely reluctant to give his consent to this match.

First, he declared that he was not rich enough to take a daughter-in-law from such a good family, to which Madame Wu replied that, since they were now contracting a new relationship upon an old relationship, such compliments were superfluous. Then he said that as Ta Tung was nominally his first-born, it would be unfair to this boy if the other were engaged first. At this Madame Wu laughed ironically and hinted that she was not interested in the fisherman's boy at all.

Finally, he argued that it was always undesirable for first cousins to marry. But she pointed out to him that this was not a case of what was commonly called "the homecoming of flesh and blood" Boys take after their fathers, and girls after their mothers. If Li Ming had had a girl, and Lotus Fragrance were a boy, then it would indeed be a bad match, for Li Ming's daughter would be like her mother and the boy would be like his father, and the marriage would be almost as improper as one between a brother and a sister.

Naturally Madame Wu got her own way, and Li Ming came home with a heavy heart. He told his wife of the match. She was overjoyed at the prospect of having her brother's daughter as her son's wife.

When Madame Wu, according to custom, sent Lotus Fragrance's time and date of birth on a piece of red paper

to the Li family, in exchange for the boy's birth date, as a token of the betrothal, Li Ming was naturally perplexed, and stared at the paper for some time without seeing anything. Suddenly he observed that Lotus Fragrance was born at 10 o'clock on the morning of the second of the fourth moon of the seventh year of Kwang Hsu, i.e., at the hour of the "snake", on the day of the "snake", in the month of the "snake" and in the year of the "snake"! It was an extraordinary combination which entranced Li Ming. He sent for a blind fortune-teller and read out the eight characters to him, saying it was the nativity of a bondmaid's daughter.

The astrologer carefully calculated the girl's destiny and kept on shaking his head. Indeed, he was so shocked by this strange nativity that he exclaimed

"I have to be very candid with you, sir. The girl is terrible, impossible, dreadful, sir! I have never seen anything worse than this, sir!"

Li Ming was taken aback and said:

"Is that so? It's very awkward"

"There is no need for me to make a commentary, sir, but I can tell you some fatal assets of hers, sir. She had 'The Grand Ruination', sir, in addition to 'The Eight Failures', sir . . . one alone of which is enough to ruin a family, sir. Then she has all the feminine vices: 'The Peach Blossom', sir, which gives her the privilege of having at least two husbands at the same time, sir, 'The Sweeping Broom', sir, which sweeps away her fortune and condemns her to constant poverty, sir; 'The Mourning Skirt', sir, which means that she'll be a widow, sir, and 'The White Tiger', sir, which will make her childless, sir!"

"No!" exclaimed Li Ming, alarmed. "It surely can't be as bad as all that!"

"Yes, sir," replied the blind fortune-teller "It is the

worst combination I have ever met during my thirty years' career as a professional astrologer, sir. It is most extraordinary, sir!"

"Are you sure you haven't made a mistake somewhere . . . ?"

"No mistake, sir."

As soon as the fortune-teller had been rewarded and was gone, Li Ming discussed the matter with his wife once more. Although a rather superstitious woman, she was extremely reluctant to let her niece be married into any other family than her own. Yet the girl's 'assets', as called by the blind man, were horrible enough to frighten any mortal. She was equally reluctant to expose her son to the danger of marrying a girl with such a nativity. However, she was as resourceful as her mother and made a wonderful suggestion.

"Perhaps it would be better to accept her as the fiancee of Ta Tung, who also has an extremely queer nativity. This would enable us to keep our niece in our family and, on the other hand, save our son from suffering any misfortune because of his wife"

"But your mother would never consent to this. She told me that she was not interested in the fisherman's boy."

"Humour her in whatever she wants you to do. She is sixty-eight this year and the marriage needn't be consummated before Lotus Fragrance is eighteen. My mother needn't know of our arrangements. I'll have a talk with my brother privately."

"But if your brother won't accept Ta Tung? You'd better have a secret talk with your sister-in-law . . ."

"Of course I'll have to tell her too. But why should you think my brother is not as reasonable as my sister-in-law? Anyhow, there is the girl's nativity. They cannot force us"

Her proposal proved to be the solution. Both her

brother and sister-in-law agreed—especially her sister-in-law, so much so that Li Ming's wife was somewhat surprised. And they all thought it sensible to humour the old lady. From that time on, whenever reference was made to the match, they were extremely careful to couch their remarks in terms as ambiguous as possible.

CHAPTER II

*“River courses bend and change,
Earthquakes heave mountain range
Man is but a feeble creature,
Yet no power can change his nature”*

IT was rather difficult for Li Ming to understand his own feelings towards Ta Tung, nominally his elder son. He was certainly very proud of the boy, or perhaps of his choice—rather as a collector is proud of a recent purchase. If some authoritative expert should happen to prove that favourite of his to be a common pebble, he would most certainly throw it away without the slightest hesitation. His own son, Shiao Ming, he loved like “a pearl in the palm of his hand”. It was but natural that, though the two boys were treated generally in the same way, Shiao Ming always seemed to be given precedence.

At the early age of three the children began to show their ability to learn. Shiao Ming was decidedly the cleverer of the two. He could learn very quickly, but, alas, also forgot as quickly. Ta Tung had to be taught several times before he could remember a word, but once it entered into his mind, there it remained permanently. As he was very independent, nobody paid attention to him except Li Kang. The favoured Shiao Ming was a very endearing child, though perhaps a little more babyish,

often in his mother's arms or sitting on her lap. However, nothing towards the education of the children was done until they were six, when Li Ming thought he must engage a good tutor for them. During these three years, though nobody was taking seriously Ta Tung's eagerness for learning, the little boy had picked up quite a lot of knowledge in the course of frequent visits to "his uncle", as he called Li Kang, and by playing in the schoolroom of Ta Yu, Li Kang's boy.

The tutor that Li Ming had in mind was the only "Cultivated Talent" in the village. Li Ming had never much liked him, but there he was, and Li Ming had no choice. Early one morning, after the Lantern Festival, when all the New Year's rejoicings had come to an end and people were beginning to resume their work, Li Ming ordered Old Chang to select a tiny chicken from his hen-run and buy a very small leg of pork. He then ordered Old Wang to take these things for him and walk before him while he started to pay a special call on *the* scholar.

As they approached the place, they saw a big crowd gathering at the door. Li Ming looked in and perceived a number of the villagers dividing up a recently killed pig in the courtyard, and the three gods in the village placed, together with their sedan chairs, in the middle chamber. He ordered Old Wang to ask one of the crowd what was the matter. When told the reason for this outrageous happening, he made Old Wang hide the chicken and pork under his garments and hurried home as quickly as possible.

On his way back Li Ming felt desperate. Since *the* "Cultivated Talent" in the village was not available, the only alternative was no other than Li Kang, his unworthy younger brother! Li Ming knew that, though his brother was not entitled to wear the official "Blue gown" and would most probably wear a "White coat" for the rest of

his life, his literary talent was really second to that of nobody he knew. Of course, there was always his mother-in-law, Madame Wu, who could supply anything he wanted, but he felt sure that she would recommend somebody utterly useless, who might at the same time demand exorbitant tuition fees.

Much against his will, therefore, Li Ming was forced to turn to Li Kang. However, he decided that in paying a visit to his brother he had no need to bring any presents. But to show his great respect for the noble profession of teaching, he magnanimously determined to take the leg of pork with him, and ordered Old Wang to set the chicken free. As this was a somewhat formal call, he went to his younger brother's quarters not through either of the pass-doors but by the front gate.

As a rule the front doors of a house in the country are left wide open. Li Ming coughed and went straight into the middle chamber without anybody noticing his ceremonious entrance. He had to call out.

"Ta Yu! Is your father in?"

"Yes, uncle," answered the boy from the study. He came out and was surprised to see his uncle standing in the middle of the chamber with a lump of pork in his hand. "Won't you sit down, uncle?"

Li Ming smiled and gave the present to the boy.

"This is my present to your father! Take it to your mother!"

"Oh no, uncle! Thank you very much, but . . . but I don't think . . ." The boy was only nine years old, and did not know whether to accept it or not.

"Don't be silly, Ta Yu! I tell you to take it, it is all right. Take it to your mother! But where is your father?"

The boy received the piece of pork with thanks, and tried to avoid answering his uncle's question. He knew his father was still in bed, and he also knew that his uncle

did not approve of this habit of his father's. He started to run to his mother in the kitchen. Li Ming asked:

"Is your father still in bed?"

"My great-aunt hasn't got up yet."

The boy tried to avoid mentioning his father. The so-called "great-aunt" was an elderly woman of the village three generations above Li Kang. She had no one to depend upon and Li Kang welcomed her to stay in his family. As it was difficult for Ta Yu to call her great-great-aunt, they all called her Great-aunt.

"But has your father got up?"

The boy was embarrassed and answered:

"You had better ask my mother."

He rushed out of the middle chamber.

The mother simply could not believe that her brother-in-law would give them a piece of pork, however small, and she hurried to find out the cause of the mistake. Li Ming told her that there had been no misunderstanding at all, and that he would like to see his brother as soon as possible. She went to call up her husband, and the boy was left with his uncle.

In such cold weather it took a much longer time than the guest could bear to wait for the host to say good-bye to his warm bed and to put on his day clothes. The longer Li Ming waited, the more he regretted what he was doing. He now clearly saw that a man who lingered in his bed until the sun had risen to three poles' height was not worthy to be the teacher of his son. He had a good mind to give up the idea, but the trouble was that he had already presented the leg of pork to his brother! He could not possibly ask for it back.

"What book are you reading, Ta Yu?"

"The Book of Odes, uncle"

"Do you find it very difficult?"

"No, uncle. I find it very easy to learn and to

remember, and most of the poems are very amusing!"

"Amusing? Do you understand the meaning of the poems?"

"Yes, uncle, I do. My father explains every line for me!"

Now this was something that Li Ming had never dreamed of. A child of nine actually able to understand the meaning of the poems in the Book of Odes! When Li Ming had been made to read and recite these poems in his own schooldays, he had been unable to understand a single line. And now that he was fifty-six he really wasn't a bit the wiser. Perhaps Li Kang was a good teacher. Anyhow, a man who could explain every line of the Book of Odes must, he mused, be a very fair scholar.

When Li Kang at last came out to the middle chamber, he found his brother deeply rapt in thought. He expressed his thanks for and also his surprise at the present and asked his brother very candidly what it was he desired. Li Ming smiled and said

"They are . . . I mean it is just a little present from my children to their teacher. I hope you will accept your nephews as your pupils!"

"Why on earth choose me as their teacher when there is an unemployed 'Cultivated Talent' in our village? Are you in your right senses?" Li Kang was even more surprised than before.

"Honestly, I don't think he is a better scholar than you . . ."

"That may be true! But how unlike you! Anyway I fear I can't accept your present. I don't want to take any pupils. You had better take the leg of pork to him. He will feel greatly insulted if he knows you have asked me first!"

"No . . . no!" Li Ming did not know how to explain

Li Kang was not a little annoyed with his brother for having interrupted his rest. He ordered his boy to fetch the piece of pork from the kitchen and gave it back to Li Ming.

Li Ming was desperate. He had to be truthful.

"Well, my younger brother, as a matter of fact I've been to his house first, but I don't think he will be available for some time to come. And besides, I don't want my children to study under a man who is a crook!"

Li Kang could hardly believe his ears.

"What! A crook? You say *he* is a crook?"

"Yes! He is! The village folks are at this very moment busy confiscating his store of food. I saw them—they had just killed his pig and were dividing it. He is ruined now! I can't possibly have him as a teacher!"

"What is the matter?" inquired Li Kang.

"You know that during the last few years he has been in charge of the fund for the sacrifice to the village gods. They have just discovered that he made out false accounts of the expenses, and that a great part of the fund has gone into his own pocket . . ."

"Of course! What of it?" sneered Li Kang. "I must go there and stop the outrage!" He turned to go out, ignoring entirely his brother and the intentions of his visit.

"Hey! What is the matter with you?" Li Ming rushed out after him to drag him back. "You can't do that, you fool! The people will turn on you . . . you will be attacked!"

But Li Ming was too late. Li Kang dashed to the scene of the outrage and stood in the middle of the gateway. He addressed the crowd.

"Pardon me, my venerable elders and my beloved brothers! May I have a few words with you?"

All the people there gathered around him and maintained a temporary silence. He went on furiously.

"I have just heard that our 'Cultivated Talent' has borrowed, without letting us know, a large part of the public money. I am not surprised. And nor should you be. Our 'Cultivated Talent' is an elderly man, and besides, he is a scholar! Can he till the fields? No! Can he work in the garden? No! Can he push a wheelbarrow? No! Can he carry a pair of baskets and sell things in the market? No! All of you were perfectly aware of that when you elected him as the treasurer! To-day you find he has used some of the public money and you are angry! Now, please tell me, if our 'Cultivated Talent' does not treat the public money as his own, how is he going to live?"

Li Kang had always been very popular among his village folks, and his word was greatly respected. Everybody knew that Li Ming had no love for the 'Cultivated Talent', so there was no doubt that the speaker was acting without favouritism or prejudice. After all, the villagers were very simple people and so they began to disperse, grumbling that it was only so-and-so who had told them to come. Though Li Kang knew all the ring-leaders quite well, he decided not to probe into what had already happened, and urged everybody to go home. He picked out six young men and ordered them to bear the three sedan chairs together with the gods back to the Ancestral Temple.

All the members of the household had escaped to some other place, except the mother of the scholar. She now came out to thank the kind-hearted peacemaker. But Li Kang was the last man in the world to stay to receive thanks, and before the elderly woman had reached the court-yard he was out of sight. Li Ming, however, came over to speak to her.

study with two small desks and two stools. When the important day, the twentieth, arrived, Li Kang had entirely forgotten about it and was lingering in his bed. Suddenly he heard the deafening sound of fire-crackers. Just as he was about to ask his wife what was the matter, she rushed in to tell him that his elder brother had brought his pupils to the school.

Li Ming had to wait for quite a long time before Li Kang turned up in the study. Even when he was at last there, he was not properly dressed, or at least not attired in a manner befitting a tutor. However, Li Ming controlled his temper as best he could and, after bowing to his younger brother, told his children to kneel down, first to the tablet of Confucius and then to their tutor. He had a slender bamboo stick in his hand, and he presented it to Li Kang, saying

"Here is the cane, beat my children with it as much as you think necessary. The proverb says: 'In merely feeding the children without sending them to school, the father is wrong. In merely teaching them without strict discipline, the teacher is irresponsible.' I hope you will wear out this cane by using it pretty frequently—and don't forget to ask me to send you a second one very soon!"

"Oh, no! Please get up and go to your seats, my good pupils," said Li Kang, and he helped the children to get up and showed them to their desks. In the meantime he waved away the stick. "No, my elder brother, I have no use for such a horrible instrument. I'm a teacher—it is only the blacksmith, I think, whose motto is 'strike incessantly'!"

Li Ming then presented the pupils' offering to the tutor, together with a small parcel containing the "junior schoolmates'" gifts to Ta Yu, their "elder schoolmate". After these formalities Li Ming bade good-bye to his brother

On his way out he told his sister-in-law that, from hence-forward, he would be pleased to supply the school with tea. He said he would order Double Blessing to bring an urn of hot tea together with four bowls to the school every morning, and to take them away every evening.

When Li Kang examined the things which his pupils had brought him he found that, besides brush pens and other writing materials, each of them had a set of "The Four Books", the famous Confucian Classics, with him. He didn't think this great work, however important and good, entirely suitable for children of six, and he called Ta Tung to come to the side of his desk.

"Now, Ta Tung, bring your 'Four Books' to me. I don't think you can read them yet. 'The Great Learning' and 'The Golden Mean' are too difficult even for children in their early teens; so how can *you* expect to understand them? 'The Book of Mencius' is full of arguments and debates, and perhaps will be very helpful to you one day later on, so I must not make you hate it by forcing you to read it at your tender age. 'The Book of Confucius' is a very important work for the formation of your character I think I'll teach you that as soon as you have finished this book!"

Taking out from his drawer a tiny book entitled 'Modern Classics', he opened it on his desk. He took his vermilion pen from the pen-holder and, punctuating the first few sentences of the new book, he led the boy to read them:

" *The modern world
Is made up of two hemispheres.
The Eastern and the Western
There are five Continents:
Asia, Europe, Africa,
And America, which is divided
Into South and North.'*"

And he went on to explain to the boy what the words "hemisphere" and "continents" meant.

Ta Tung was fascinated by these novel terms, and, being an intelligent child, learnt these things very quickly and enjoyed the new book very much Shiao Ming was given "The Book of Family-names" to read It started thus.

" 'Chao, Chien, Sun, Li;
Chow, Wu, Cheng, Wang
Hung, Chen, Tsu, Wei;
Chiang, Shing, Han, Yang
Chu, Ching, Yu, Hsu,
Ho, Lu, Shu, Chang.' "

As they were all common surnames, there was nothing to explain. Though these were names that Shiao Ming was accustomed to hearing every day, the characters by which they were represented he found extremely difficult to remember. Li Kang was a very lenient teacher, and never liked to use the "corrective cane". Shiao Ming progressed very slowly.

In China, a year is generally divided into three terms The first break after the New Year is the Dragon Festival, which occurs on the fifth day of the fifth moon The school is usually closed for the day, and the teacher is given a dinner When, on that day, Li Kang was enjoying his first dinner at his elder brother's house, he was, for the first time, given the seat of honour, and received, also for the first time in his life, his salary for the period, ten thousand pieces of cash in notes wrapped up in a red envelope.

Then, and only then, it is allowed, according to our custom, to ask the teacher what has been going on in the schoolroom, which is regarded as a forbidden palace with the teacher as the sole dictator Li Ming was far from

satisfied with the books used by his brother in teaching his children, and so, during dinner, he informed Li Kang that he did not consider "The Book of Family-names" at all a suitable reading book for his son. This book, he observed, was a very proper one for the sons of porters, and of sedan-chair bearers, who had to be prepared to read name-plates on doors. So Li Kang had to agree to teach the boys one of the Four Books after the first book was finished.

Neither was Li Ming satisfied with the books which Ta Tung had read. He said that words such as Europe, America, Napoleon, Columbus, sounded ridiculous and asked his brother to explain why the orthodox books were not used. He added that he knew Ta Yu had read The Book of Odes. Why, he demanded, should the tutor give strange and useless books to his paying pupils to read while teaching his own son to read good ones?

Li Kang felt insulted and replied angrily that he taught his son the Book of Odes because he intended the boy to be a farmer. A farmer, he said, ought to know all the rural songs and ballads in that book. Ta Tung was going to be a man of the world, therefore he ought to have a knowledge of the world. Shiao Ming was best suited to be a merchant, therefore he ought to learn the surnames and other common subjects instead of the theoretical teachings of Confucius and Mencius which he thought would be ruinous if applied to business transactions.

However, Li Ming did not wish his children to be deprived of a classical education, and so the little boys were given the Book of Confucius to read, starting from the next day. Ta Tung was a diligent pupil, well able to grasp whatever a young mind could understand, while Shiao Ming loathed this book even more than his first—for none of "The Four Books" was rhymed.

The second holiday came on the fifteenth of the eighth

moon, the Mid-Autumn Festival When Li Kang received the second envelope, in which another ten thousand pieces of cash in notes were enclosed, he remarked jokingly that he was worth only the half of the amount. The reason, he said, was simply that he could not induce Shiao Ming to pay any attention to his studies. As the boy was still very young, however, nobody was worried about it.

Li Kang was secretly pleased that Shiao Ming did not want to study at all. The boy had a very bad temper and did not like studying. So instead of wasting his time trying to induce him to read, Li Kang concentrated his energy on teaching Ta Tung. By the end of the year Ta Tung had finished "The Modern Classics" and three volumes of "The Four Books", while his foster-brother was still struggling with "The Book of Family-names" and had hardly begun the Book of Confucius

On the twenty-fourth of the twelfth moon, when the school was closed for the year, a third dinner was prepared for the teacher. The children, now nearly seven years old, were given for the first time in their lives independent seats on the square dinner table. The women, as a rule, were not included when the dinner was prepared for the tutor. But when the tutor was no other than the brother of the host, it was quite proper for the feast to take the form of a family party. However, Li Ming thought it was more economical to exclude his wife, for otherwise he would feel himself obliged to invite his sister-in-law and his nephew.

When they were talking about the boys' work of the year, Li Kang said that during the first term Shiao Ming didn't start to read at all; and after the Dragon Boat Festival, as the days were growing warmer and warmer, the boy was very drowsy and used to fall asleep in the study. Since the Mid-Autumn Festival, Shiao Ming had

been putting off everything serious and waiting for the New Year holidays.

Li Ming, on hearing this unkind report of his son, was silent for a moment. Ta Tung was amused by this account and said unexpectedly.

"Father, I think my brother must be acting in accordance with a poem I have just learned. This is the poem:

*In the spring I put off reading
Till the summer comes.
In the summer I lie dreaming
Of the autumn plums.
In the fall the year is passing
To its final phase;
Pack our books away and gather
Sticks for winter blaze."*

Li Kang laughed and said the innocent boy was perfectly right. But Li Ming did not enjoy the joke and asked sternly what progress Ta Tung had made during the year. Li Kang was very pleased to find a chance to praise his favourite pupil.

"He has read in one year more books than a boy usually contrives to read in two years! He is extremely intelligent . . ."

Li Ming did not like this, and interrupted his brother.

"One who is extremely intelligent in his boyhood is liable to be stupid and good-for-nothing when he is grown up!"

Li Kang realised what his brother was slyly insinuating, and hesitated to reply. He was wondering whether a guest had any right to offer a sharp retort to his host. Again Ta Tung put in unexpectedly and innocently:

"Father, you must have been extremely intelligent in your boyhood!"

Li Kang tried his best to suppress his laughter, but

failed. Li Ming was infuriated, but could find no words with which to reproach the boy beyond telling him to be silent.

The school reopened on the sixteenth of the first moon—the day after the Lantern Festival. Shiao Ming had enjoyed his long holidays so much that he now loathed the sight of the books. He was often absent, and his customary excuse was that he didn't feel well. When he went to the school, he devoted most of his time to quarrelling and fighting with Ta Tung and Ta Yu. Ta Tung was a bigger and stronger boy, and always defended himself vigorously and defeated his aggressor. When Shiao Ming was in a tight corner, he invariably wept and cried for help. Unfortunately Li Kang was a man of strong prejudice, and never once scolded Ta Tung whatever the result of their fight might be.

However, Ta Yu found himself in a very difficult position. He was three years older than Shiao Ming, therefore it was not fair play to fight the smaller boy with all his strength. Being the son of the teacher he could not, according to the etiquette of the children, report to or call for his father. Li Kang also often found himself in a dilemma—it scarcely looked well for him to punish Shiao Ming when the boy was quarrelling with his own son, and it would not be fair at all to punish Ta Yu.

In order to avoid any unpleasant occurrences in the schoolroom, Li Kang sent his son to the fields to start his agricultural training before he reached the age of eleven. When the bigger boy was gone the school was much quieter, because Shiao Ming had lost his chief victim.

It was at this time (1888) that the Government suddenly announced that henceforth, in addition to the classics and histories, the subject of mathematics was to be included in the state examination. When this unbeliev-

able news first reached the village, Li Ming was overjoyed. He was an expert in the art of counting, and knew all the uses of the Chinese abacus. On the other hand, Li Kang's fingers had never touched such a counting apparatus and nobody had ever heard of him making any sort of calculations in figures.

One morning, long before the school broke for lunch, Li Ming took two abacuses and paid a surprise call on his younger brother. Passing through the pass-door in the front and approaching the schoolroom unobserved, he heard both boys shouting excitedly. He was surprised and went before the latticed window of the room to have a peep into the school. The tutor was not there. Evidently Li Kang was still in his bed!

However, Li Kang's seat and desk were not unoccupied. They had been shifted into the centre of the room. From a distance it appeared that this was the audience hall of a great mandarin. The chief seat was occupied by a tiny old man, be-spectacled and adorned with a slight moustache and beard. Although his demeanour was one of dignity, he seemed at the moment to be in a fury, for he was banging the desk fiercely with his paper-weight. At the end of each series of knocks he shouted. "Drag him out of the yamen and chop off his head!"

The voice betrayed him. He was no other than Shiao Ming—and his spectacles, moustache and beard were nothing but smudges of black ink. He was acting the part of a great official whose principal diversion seemed to be chopping off people's heads.

In another part of the room Ta Tung was making his headquarters. He had rearranged the desks and stools in such a manner as to represent a small fishing boat. He wore a rain-mantle and hat, both made of cardboard, and looked exactly like his father, the fisherman, who was dressed thus when sailing away in his boat eight years

ago. The boy's beautiful silk gown was now transformed into a fishing net tied to a long string. The budding fisherman had just cast his net into the imaginary water, and was on the point of drawing it in slowly and steadily, as if the net were full of fish.

This little scene filled Li Ming's heart with mixed feelings. It was very gratifying, of course, to see that Shiao Ming was, even now, every inch a great official, but what Ta Tung was doing gave him pain, disappointment, disgust, regret and anger. For eight years he had been financing an investment, on account of which he had built many a magnificent castle in the air. Now he had suddenly become a confirmed believer in the proverb "You can never expect to get ivory from a dog's mouth." What a great waste it had been for those eight years! The mere thought of the money he had spent on this worthless fisherman's boy was enough to drive him crazy. He rushed into the room and cried vehemently:

"You low-born pup! In spite of all the money I spent on your education, you are a starving fisherman's brat to the very marrow of your bones! Now, get out! Get out of here, you low-born pup!"

Ta Tung immediately knew he had done something wrong without being able to realise either the nature or the seriousness of his offence. He therefore doffed his hat and mantle and began to move back the desks and chairs to their original places. Shiao Ming was at first frightened by his father's fierce mood, but he soon regained his composure when he perceived that Ta Tung was the only one who had committed any sort of crime. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to see Ta Tung punished for being in the wrong. He came to his father's side and pointed at his foster-brother.

"Father, he won't play with me at all and says he will kill me if I chop off his head."

"So you want to kill Shiao Ming when he asks you to play with him, you low-born pup? Get out of here at once!" shouted Li Ming. He sprang forward, took Ta Tung by the neck, and tried to drag him out.

Ta Tung resented this unjust treatment most strenuously. Being an obstinate boy, he maintained silence and held on tightly to his desk in defiance of his father. Li Ming dragged the boy with a little more force and down went the desk with books and papers flying everywhere. Li Ming became even more furious.

"You rebel! I'll throw you out!"

But it was not a very easy job for a man nearly sixty years of age to throw out Ta Tung, who was now quite a big lad—indeed, unusually big for his age. He clung to anything within reach. The struggle was so desperate that hardly a single piece of furniture remained standing, and each one fell with a loud crash. Li Ming shouted and swore, but made little progress. Shiao Ming watched the show with the greatest glee.

Meanwhile, Li Kang had got up. Hearing all the uproar in the study, he hurried there to investigate. He was as astonished as he was indignant at the sight of the struggling combatants and the overturned furniture. He called out angrily:

"Stop it! Stop all this! What on earth are you doing here?"

On hearing his brother's voice, Li Ming, who was panting and wellnigh exhausted, immediately halted. Unfortunately, at this juncture Ta Tung, who either had not heard Li Kang's command or did not want a truce before getting a little of his own back, took unfair advantage of the situation by throwing Li Ming to the ground.

"Stop it, Ta Tung," said Li Kang again, rushing up to help his brother.

Li Ming was so angry that he refused to let his brother touch him. He considered Li Kang in the light of an accomplice of the rebellious Ta Tung. He sat up on the floor and collected his abacuses. Shaking his head and grinding his teeth he said:

"A fine teacher . . . you are! I am paying you . . . to teach the boy . . . to attack me!"

Li Kang was about to scold Ta Tung for his rude behaviour, but when he heard this nonsensically unjust accusation he at once changed his attitude. Going to his desk, he sat down and said

"But I happened to see that you were attacking him! You tried, happily without success, to throw him out of my study!"

Directly he could regain his breath, Li Ming retorted

"Study! I thought this was a dirty fishing boat! The little brute has learned nothing but fishing and wrestling here!"

Now it is well known that to enter a schoolroom without the permission of the teacher is extremely bad manners, and to take any liberties with a pupil—even though the pupil be your son—is outrageous. Li Kang felt he was grossly insulted by the trespasser's behaviour, and assumed a sterner tone.

"Since you have come to my school, have the goodness to take a seat." He perceived that there was no chair for his brother, so he ordered Ta Tung to provide one. Ta Tung, who was busily rearranging the furniture, picked up an overturned chair and offered it to the guest. Li Ming ignored the boy completely and came up to Li Kang's desk.

"I have no intention of sitting down! I came here to tell you that the Government has just announced the inclusion of mathematics in the curriculum of the state examination, and I want the boys to learn it. I brought

two abacuses with me, but I now find the school isn't a school at all . . .”

Li Kang laughed ironically and interrupted.

“Yes, I did notice the wrestling match. But I fail to understand why you should bring the abacuses here.”

“They've got to learn it now! If you can't teach them, then I must teach them myself! I told you that the Government . . .”

“So soon as the Government announced that mathematics would be included in the state examination, I had, in fact, already started to teach them the Arabic figures. We have no use for your abacuses!” Li Kang took out from his drawer a little book, which he opened and showed to his brother. It was an elementary text-book on mathematics and full of Arabic figures. “You see, this is what they have to learn now.”

Li Ming looked at the book in silence. This was another blow to him. He sneered.

“You always have new-fangled ideas!”

“This is not *my* ‘new-fangled’ idea! It was published in accordance with the ‘new-fangled’ requirements of the Ministry of Learning!” retorted Li Kang.

“Well, you'd better keep that for your son! My Shiao Ming is not going to learn that!” He threw the book back to Li Kang.

“Good! Then I needn't waste any more time on him. Ta Tung is the only one who is keen on it . . .”

“Ta Tung? Neither is he to learn that! I'm going to take him away!”

“Take him away? What do you mean?”

“He has learned nothing except fishing and fighting. I'm going to send him to where he belongs!”

“You err, my elder brother! It is Shiao Ming whom you ought to take away from here. He has learned practically nothing and has persistently made trouble!”

"You needn't complain about my boy any further, since I've decided to remove him too!"

"I don't mind your taking away Shiao Ming. But as for my Ta Tung . . ."

"*Your* Ta Tung won't be *yours* any more. He is *my* son and I am taking him away to-day! This very minute!"

"This is a strange way to treat your tutor! Why, it is not even the end of a term yet, is it?" said Li Kang, feeling insulted.

"Oh, I understand. Don't worry yourself about that I'll send you your salary for the term to-morrow! I don't mind that in the least." Li Ming *did* mind that, but he had determined to make as big a sacrifice as need be.

"You may keep your dirty money! I don't want a solitary piece of cash from you!" Li Kang stood up and looked fiercely at his brother and Shiao Ming. "And now, get out of my house! Go on, hurry, both of you!"

"No, not both of us, but the three of us! I'm sorry for you, but I know you won't accept any unearned salary." Li Ming took his son by the hand and signalled to Ta Tung to join them.

Ta Tung, who had heard the conversation, was full of apprehension and felt no desire to go. But Li Kang urged

"All right, Ta Tung, you may go! As he is, nominally, your 'father', you are bound to obey his orders. But I'll see what I can do for you later."

Ta Tung made no answer and began to collect together his books. Li Ming said impatiently:

"Come on, Ta Tung! Leave those books alone and come with us!"

Ta Tung glanced at Li Kang hesitatingly and found his tutor nodding his approval. He put down his books and followed Li Ming and Shiao Ming out.

Soon after they were gone, Double Blessing came to the school to collect the things and the boys' books. The girl

came and went, as usual, by the pass-door in the back of Li Kang's house. By way of confirming his resolve to have no more to do with his brother, Li Kang followed her to the pass-door, which he there and then slammed and bolted.

As Double Blessing handed the books to her master, she told him about the slamming and bolting of the pass-door. Li Ming was greatly incensed by this act of his brother's, and ordered the girl to go and slam and bolt the other pass-door, which was in the front part of the house. The girl obeyed her master's order with the greatest pleasure, and even went so far as to slam the door twice before bolting it.

However, her pleasure was very short-lived. When she came to report to her master what she had done, Li Ming had had his second thoughts. Li Kang had shut the door which he generally used to go to the barns because he had no more rice stored there. But Li Ming could by no means afford to take revenge in the same manner. For Li Kang's garden, the only way to get to which was now through the other pass-door, was full of vegetables that Li Ming had recently planted. So the unfortunate Double Blessing was now told to go back and re-open the pass-door as softly as she could possibly contrive.

CHAPTER III

*"This old rope lay in the hedge,
Thrown away, I vow.
When I got it home, I found
It fastened to a cow"*

TA TUNG found it impossible to get to sleep till very late that night. On the following morning, when he rose and

went into the middle chamber, he found breakfast was not yet served. He felt it was late, but as there was no sun that day and as the only clock in the house was in his mother's bedroom, he went there to see the time. It was nearly ten o'clock, but he found that his mother, as well as Shiao Ming, were both still in bed. There was no sign of his father.

Ta Tung realised that they had probably finished with school-going for the time being. He did not trouble, as he always had to do, to urge Shiao Ming to get up and prepare to go to school. He merely made his customary salutation to his mother and then went to the kitchen to inquire about the breakfast. Old Chang told him that everything was ready, but that he was ordered to wait for the master, who had gone out very early that morning.

Soon Li Ming came back and ordered the breakfast to be served immediately. Before he sat down at his table he went to his study to write something. Putting the piece of paper on which he had written into his pocket, he came back to the middle chamber for his meal. When his wife and Shiao Ming came out from the bedroom he told her to get the maids to "pack up the things at once". She was slightly surprised. Looking at Ta Tung apprehensively, she went away through the back chamber. While Ta Tung was swallowing his breakfast ravenously, he felt it was a little strange that his mother did not go to her own room. He wondered what were the things which his father wanted the maids to pack.

Before they finished their breakfast, Double Blessing came to the middle chamber with a small bundle. Glancing at Ta Tung uneasily, she put the bundle near him and said nothing. Li Ming finished his rice in great haste and ordered Ta Tung to hurry up. As soon as the boy put down his bowl and chopsticks Li Ming, picking up the

small bundle with one hand and taking Ta Tung by the other, started to go out of the house, almost dragging the boy after him.

Ta Tung was bewildered, and the more so when they passed the main entrance. On seeing their approach, Old Wang hurried forward, as was his custom as well as his duty, to relieve his master of his burden. But with a slight jerk of his head, Li Ming signed to him to go away without uttering a syllable. Li Ming was well known for his habit of making every possible use of his domestics. One seldom saw him going out carrying even a small parcel himself. To Ta Tung's quick mind it was clear that his father did not want anyone else to know where they were going. Ta Tung was worried. He asked:

"Where are we going, father?"

"Don't ask. Come with me, and you'll know all about it presently."

"Is it very far, father? Shall I carry the bundle for you?"

Li Ming did not answer.

Ta Tung was aware that something must be wrong. He looked back at the main entrance of the house which he had just left and saw his mother and brother were standing outside it and looking at him and his father. On their faces there seemed to be strange expressions. Some of the servants, too, were peeping at him from behind their mistress and Shiao Ming.

"Where are we going, father?" demanded Ta Tung. "Unless you tell me where we are going, I won't follow you."

Dragging the boy along, Li Ming answered briefly "To where you belong."

Ta Tung's pace slackened instinctively. "I won't go away from my home. I belong to my uncle's school. I want to go back."

The boy, not caring very much how he behaved in the street, began to drag his father back.

"Stop this!" shouted Li Ming. "Won't you behave yourself in a public thoroughfare?"

"No!" Ta Tung was an obstinate boy and his father knew it. "I must know where you are taking me to!"

To struggle in the street was not decent. Li Ming had to coax the boy to follow him.

"I have found a very nice place for you, and I am taking you there."

"But what is the nice place? What am I to do there?"

"Since you are so keen on fishing, I'm sending you to a fisherman who will take you as his apprentice. You may learn fishing from him to your heart's content! Now do you know where you are going?" Dragging the boy along, he quickened his pace again. "Quick, come with me!"

"Fishing?" The boy was undecided. "But what will my uncle say?"

"Your uncle? Who's your uncle?" sneered Li Ming.

By this time they had already got out of the inhabited part of the village and were in the open country, heading straight for the Bridge of Heaven. Li Ming decided to tell the boy everything.

"You have no uncle, at least not that I know of. Your father was a fisherman."

"I know that," came the unexpected answer.

"You know that, do you? Who told you? I'm sure it was your good-for-nothing . . . good-for-nothing . . ." Li Ming couldn't find a better word, so he had to say ". . . your good-for-nothing uncle."

"No!" said the boy. "Shiao Ming told me that first. Then I heard it from everybody and everywhere. My uncle always forbade Shiao Ming to mention that I was

a ‘wretched fisherman’s brat’. You called me that yourself only yesterday!”

“Since you know it, so much the better!” said Li Ming
“But I tried my best to make a man out of you . . . and I failed. I *bought* you from your starving father eight years ago . . . I paid . . . I paid a fairly good price for you . . . and you have cost me quite a lot more during these eight years. Your food, your clothes and numerous other expenses. I paid sixty thousand pieces of cash to that good-for-nothing brother of mine to teach you, but Shiao Ming has learned nothing at all and you have become an absolute rascal!”

“I’ve not become a rascal . . .” protested the boy.

“How dare you contradict me, you confounded rascal!” exploded Li Ming. “And after I have spent so much money on you and have brought you up, what is my reward? You confounded rascal, you nearly killed me yesterday.”

Ta Tung’s heart was full of remorse on account of the incident of yesterday, but he felt he would rather die than apologise in respect of something for which he knew he was not to blame. If Li Ming had expressed his regret first, Ta Tung would most probably have forgotten his grievance and confessed that it was his own fault. But since Li Ming was still unjustly accusing him, he maintained a sulky silence.

“The old proverb says ‘Don’t you ever try to bring up a tiger. It will repay your kindness by eating you up.’ So it is in the case of bringing up a low-born brat!” continued Li Ming “I’d rather go to Hell than keep you for another day!”

Ta Tung would have liked to tell him that he was utterly wrong, and that if he had brought up the tiger, it would most certainly repay him every single cash he had spent on it. But such words would sound like stooping

and begging, and Ta Tung was too proud to do that. Instead, he said:

"You needn't keep me! My uncle will keep me!"

"Your uncle? Who is your uncle?" jeered Li Ming. "You know he is no more your uncle than I am your father!"

"Where is . . . where is . . . where is my father, the fisherman?" asked Ta Tung hesitatingly.

"Your father, the fisherman?" sneered Li Ming. "So you call him your *father*? Well, if you wish to know, he disappeared with the two thousand . . . with the money I paid for you."

"And . . . and . . . and my mother . . ." ventured Ta Tung.

"Your mother!" echoed Li Ming with contempt. "You mean the fisherman's wife, I suppose? Well, she disappeared together with her husband."

"What is their name? What . . . what is my name . . . my real name?"

"I really don't know!"

Li Ming's heart was not at all broken when he heard the boy ask such a question, though he felt sorry for himself. That was because he now realised he had been wasting so much money in bringing up someone else's son, who, in spite of having no contact with his own father and mother, still was so anxious to know about them.

Ta Tung was silent for a while. He did not know what to say or what to do. The rumours he had often heard were now confirmed. As the terms "father" and "mother" had never conveyed any sense of endearment to him, he was neither sorry nor disappointed at finding that he was a desolate person. Strange to relate, the word "uncle" always seemed to him to have a sweeter sound than either "father" or "mother".

As they walked on, Li Ming continued to scold him and grumble about the boy's parents. Ta Tung was now rapt in thought and did not hear what the man was saying at all. He followed him across the bridge and looked listlessly at the houses which came into view. Where formerly there had been nothing at all on the sand-bank, there were now quite a lot of thatch-roofed sheds on the river-bank, besides a dozen small houses further up.

A peculiar small old hut stood there facing the river. Evidently it had never been very much a shelter from the elements even when it was new, and years of wind and rain had reduced it to a pitiful condition. Its inhabitant must be a very lazy and careless person, for it was obvious that repairs to this wretched shed were merely such as might suffice to prevent it from collapsing into ruins. It inclined ponderously towards the south, and would have fallen to the ground had it not been supported by two broken ship's masts. The roof was patched variously with palm leaves, bundles of straw and bamboo leaves, and its walls were mended with all sorts of boards, branches and fragments of broken furniture.

There was no door, and Li Ming led Ta Tung straight into the hut. A middle-aged man, clad in rags, was stooping in a corner making a fire in a broken stove with dry branches and leaves. Without getting up, he turned his ugly face to Li Ming and said

"Sit down, sir! There is no chair, please sit on my bed."

His bedding was made of straw and rags, and was too filthy for words. Li Ming regarded it with horror and remarked that he would prefer to stand.

"I'm sorry I shall have nothing to offer you, sir. I saw you coming in the distance, so I started to boil some water to make tea for you, sir." After saying this, he proceeded to blow the fire with his mouth. As neither the stove nor the hut was provided with a chimney, the little place

began to fill with smoke, which occasioned Li Ming and the boy a good deal of discomfort.

"No need to boil water, I don't want tea!" said Li Ming commandingly. "Here is your apprentice."

With his worst suspicion confirmed, Ta Tung nearly screamed. He kept his eyes on the man's big ugly face and was quite prepared to run away if the man tried to come near him. However, the man did not appear to care for the boy at all.

"Well, I suppose it's no use my trying to make the confounded fire. I know you won't drink my tea." With these words he lifted the kettle with one of his big hairy hands and poured a little water on to the fire. There was a spluttering, and clouds of steam and smoke streamed upwards and filled the hut. Li Ming and Ta Tung coughed chokingly, scarcely able to open their eyes. However, the boy, rubbing his eyes incessantly, never dared to glance away from the man, whose head as he now stood up nearly reached the roof of the tiny hut.

Stories of monsters and devils never succeeded in frightening Ta Tung. But when he saw this hobgoblin, said to be his master, emerging from a dark corner with smoke all around him, whose figure seemed to grow bigger every second, and whose head became smaller and smaller—partly because of the distance and partly by comparison with his huge body—the boy could not keep from trembling and holding tightly close to his father.

"Now, Ta Tung, here is your master!" said Li Ming as he tried to push the boy forward.

"Oh, no!" cried Ta Tung, wriggling as far back as possible. "Please, father, let us go back!"

"So my little apprentice doesn't like me? He wants to go back with his father, eh?" said the man with a grin.

"Who is your father? I'm not your father, you know!" said Li Ming sternly. He dragged the boy forward. Ta

Tung loathed the sight of his so-called master, but Li Ming's words and actions now made the boy loathe his so-called father even more. Dreadful as it was to go to the stranger, it was a relief to leave Li Ming. The boy walked slowly towards the big man with the resigned determination of a martyr, wondering what was going to happen to him and what he should do next. He peered apprehensively at the coarse and rugged features of the stranger, and shuddered at the prospect of a welcoming pat on his shoulder by his master.

However, Ta Tung overrated himself. It seemed that his master was not paying him much attention. Ignoring the boy's approach, the man looked at Li Ming and asked—

“Now, sir, have you brought me the money?”

“Yes,” said Li Ming, “but you have to sign the contract first.” He put down his bundle and took out a large piece of paper from his pocket.

“Oh, I can't sign,” said the man. “And have you brought his clothes and other belongings with you?”

“They are all here in the bundle,” replied Li Ming. “If you can't sign, you must impress your fingerprints on it.”

Ta Tung could not understand this. If Li Ming was selling the boy to the stranger, surely the seller had no need to bring money to pay the buyer. He listened to them carefully. Yet according to the contract, which the stranger would not sign until Li Ming had read it out to him, Li Ming was paying the man the sum of twenty-five thousand pieces of cash, termed as “a tuition fee and contribution towards the future expenses of the boy.”

As there was no ink in the hut, and the man seemed to be rather impatient to receive the money, he had to wet his fingers and then rub them on the outside of the kettle and in the soot and ashes of the stove, in order to secure the requisite blackness for the impression. After he had done this, which naturally rendered his hands disgustingly

dirty, he just wiped them carelessly on his trousers and stretched them straight out for the money. This Li Ming counted out to him note by note. He grabbed the notes hurriedly with his big hairy, filthy hands and thrust them into his pocket. After telling the man that from now henceforward he was to be responsible for the boy, Li Ming went away without saying a word to Ta Tung

Strangely enough, however, the instinct that made the boy rush to the doorway also caused him to pause there. Li Ming was trudging away rapidly without looking back and Ta Tung called out

"I don't want to be left here, father, please take me away from here, father! Father! Fa . . .!"

Somehow Ta Tung felt unable to go on calling this man his father. He stared hard after his figure, which grew smaller and smaller, and at last he found the sight so loathsome that he could no longer bear to look at it. He turned his eyes away and surveyed the horizon. The sky, which was somewhat overcast, began to brighten a little, but rain was drizzling down. Ta Tung cast a furtive glance at the distant figure and shouted at the top of his voice:

"It's raining! Won't you come back?"

No! It was no use. The rapidly diminishing figure went on, even increasing its speed. Ta Tung felt the gentle south-west wind sweeping his face with chilly spray, and he came back into the hut. The stranger was kneeling on the ground, with the bundle opened before him. It contained nothing valuable. They were Ta Tung's underclothes and socks, all made of homely stuff, and quite worn. They had been clean but now they were smothered with black finger-marks. The man was disappointed and threw them on his bed. Getting up, he said angrily to Ta Tung:

"So that is all you have! They won't fetch me a single

piece of cash. You little beggar! Now let's go and work."

In the country, work means work in the fields or other manual labour, while studying is considered not very much more than a pastime. Thus Ta Tung had never been told to work before and the word had a fascination for him. He was ready and eager to follow the stranger

The man went out and looked at the sky. The rain was much heavier than before and it looked as though there would be no change in the weather for some time. Without putting any waterproof apparel on, he beckoned Ta Tung to follow him as he started to go.

"Come here, you come along with me!"

"But it is raining! Aren't you going to put on something?" inquired Ta Tung "The road's very wet, and I haven't any 'nail shoes'."

Chinese shoes are like slippers. The rich wear satin shoes with leather soles, while the poor and nearly everybody in the country wears cotton ones with rag soles. They are entirely useless in wet weather. Leather boots are rarely used "Nail shoes" are commonly worn by people who do not want to go out with bare feet. They are made with cloth soaked with vegetable oil and dried, and they have wooden soles, usually about an inch thick, which are covered with big nails. The rich go about in sedan-chairs, the poor having recourse to their bare feet, and nail shoes are popular only among the middle class. The bare-footed stranger shouted impatiently.

"Nail shoes! To Hell with nail shoes! Take off your shoes and socks and come with me immediately!"

The man walked off in the rain. Ta Tung took off his shoes and socks as quickly as he could and hurried out to follow the man. The rain was pouring down and the boy rushed back to snatch a big piece of cloth which had been used for the bundle, and covered his head and shoulders

with it. The man had gone some distance and shouted again:

"Come on, you good-for-nothing toff! The rain won't kill you! Come on, quick!"

Ta Tung followed the man as quickly as he could and found it was not very easy to keep pace with his big strides. On the sandy bank of the river, Ta Tung felt it was a pleasure to walk with bare feet and the splashing sound of his footsteps was specially pleasing to his childish ears. But when they came to the rugged country road, and later the small narrow path between the watered rice fields, he began to realise that walking with his tender bare feet was a torture. As the man never slackened his pace, the child could hardly follow him.

The man was heading for the open fields far away from either village or main road. Now that he was a good distance from his village, he began to pause whenever he came to a pond. There are a good many ponds in the country, because they form the water reservoirs for the rice fields. As he stopped to survey these ponds, it gave Ta Tung the chance to come nearer and it soon became clear that the man was thoroughly soaked with rain and that from his head an aura of vapour was continuously formed, in a manner suggestive of a big hot dumpling just taken out of a steamer. The boy began to feel tired and noticed that he himself was wet and that the piece of cloth was no help at all. He felt his breath coming short and hot. He did not mind the rain in the least, for he thought that his perspiration alone would make his clothes equally wet.

The stranger told Ta Tung to mark carefully the possible outlet of several ponds, and then they turned home. It was very late in the afternoon when they arrived home and Ta Tung was extremely fatigued and hungry. Ta Tung was a long way behind the man, and

when the boy entered the hut, he saw that the stranger, half naked, was stooping over the smoking stove and cooking something.

Ta Tung took off his wet clothes and picked out a few thin articles of underwear to put on. He noticed the man had hung his thick wet coat on a peg near the stove to dry and he therefore tried to hang his own over the man's on the same peg. The man was furious. He stood up, took hold of the boy's clothes, and flung them to the ground.

"Wring them first, and then hang them elsewhere!" he shouted. "Don't you dare to put them over mine!"

Ta Tung picked up his sodden clothes and tried with all his strength to wring them. Some water trickled from them, but they were too heavy for the boy to get all the water out. He had to hang them while they were still very wet.

It was very dark and the fire of the stove was the only illumination in the place. As the boy looked at the man, the expression on the man's face seemed to be singularly frightful. He lifted the lid and, with a pair of crude chopsticks, stirred the thing he was cooking in the kettle. It was boiling, and the steam from the kettle mixed with the smoke from the stove, rushed up dancing around his ugly features. The sight reminded Ta Tung of a Taoist picture of the Underworld which he had once seen. It was a terrible devil boiling the body of a human being in his boiler and stirring it with a big fork. The boy shuddered and began to feel very cold.

The man took a bowl and helped himself without even looking at the boy. Ta Tung came near the stove and tried to look for another bowl. He could find none.

"Where are the bowls, master?" asked Ta Tung at last.
"May I have some of it? I am very hungry."

"Wait until I finish," said the man

Ta Tung waited and waited. The man had a second

and a third bowl. Ta Tung was worried. He feared there wouldn't be any left. But after his third serving the man gave the bowl to the boy and said

"Take the bowl and finish it. I don't want any more."

Evidently this was the only bowl in the house. That was why Ta Tung was told to wait until the man had finished. Ta Tung took it and looked for a basin of water in which to wash the bowl. He could find none.

"Could I wash the bowl somewhere?" asked the boy.

The man was reclining on his bed and said with a sneer

"Wash the bowl? You think I am too dirty for you—eh?"

"No! But I would like to wash . . ." ventured the boy.

"Go to the river if you want to wash anything. I am not an aristocrat!" said the man.

The boy had to go out of the hut and wash the bowl in the river. It was bitterly cold outside, and he was shivering all the time. The food in the kettle was coarse rice flour, and it was made into a mixture between thick soup and thin paste. But it was hot and he was cold and starving, so he found it quite palatable and finished the remaining two bowlfuls in no time.

After the simple meal he felt much revived and was hot and perspiring. His feet began to get warm, but they also began to become painful. There were several bruises and cuts on the soles, but he didn't mind them.

When the man saw that Ta Tung had finished his meal, he got up from the bed and, taking his half-dried coat from the peg, began to put it on. He said to Ta Tung

"Put on some more clothes and come with me to do some work."

Ta Tung took his clothes, and found they were still thoroughly wet. He hung them up again and said:

"I'm warm, I don't need them!"

"You will be frozen stiff if you don't put on some more clothes. Come on, quick!" commanded the man.

Ta Tung put on a sopping coat and followed the other out. The man took a brick and tied it at the end of a long rope. He went towards the water and threw the brick into the river while holding the other end of the rope. Then he drew in the rope and it seemed that he was drawing in something very heavy. In the dark Ta Tung could not discern what it was. But when the man came into the hut, the dying fire in the stove was just sufficiently bright to allow Ta Tung to see that there were four fish traps made of thin bamboo sticks. They were tied together with a long string and each of these traps had a few big pebbles in it so that it did not float on the water.

Removing the pebbles from them, the man gave these traps to Ta Tung, and took a hoe himself. They set out once more to the fields. It was much more difficult for Ta Tung to follow the man in the dark, though he knew they were heading for the place they had been to in the afternoon. The man walked much more slowly now, for he had to pick his way carefully, otherwise he might have made a disastrous false step. But the boy, fearing to lose sight of him, had to follow as rapidly as he could, and meanwhile the fish traps were too cumbersome a burden for him. Besides, he was shivering with cold in the piercing wind and drizzling rain and the wounds on his feet became more and more unbearably painful. Yet the boy could only bite his lips and walk on. He was eager to learn to work so that he could be independent.

What a relief to the boy it was when they stopped at a place between two ponds where they had paused in the afternoon! The level of the water in one of the ponds was much higher than that in the other, and the man, selecting the narrowest part of the path between the ponds, began to dig an outlet with his hoe. He told the boy to unloose

one of the fish traps. As the earth was very soft because of the continual rain, it was a very easy job for him to make a deep opening for the water to pass to the lower pond.

The fish trap was made to allow the fish to enter it easily, but once a fish had entered it, there it had to stay, for the mouth of the trap was covered with loose bamboo sticks to form a one-way passage. The man took a trap from Ta Tung, deposited it deeply at the bottom of the opening and then covered the gap with earth again. He told Ta Tung to note the place carefully and proceeded to three more ponds to repeat the same business with the remaining three traps.

Ta Tung was an intelligent boy. He soon learned, by asking now and then a question while they were working, what all this meant. It dawned upon him that this man was no less than a thief who made his living by stealing minnows, shrimps and other kinds of small fishes, by this cunning device of letting away water from one pond to another, to which he had no right whatever. Full of misgivings, he followed the man home, thinking hard what he ought to do.

On reaching the hut the man told him to fetch a bucket of water from the river for him to wash his feet. When he had done so, he went to bed and gave Ta Tung the following orders

"Don't let me catch you going to sleep. Wait here for the time required to boil three kettles of water or so and then go to the places where we laid our traps. Collect them and cover up the openings. Remove the fishes from the traps into the bucket and then replace the pebbles, string them together and throw them back into the river. Then I will get up and let you go to sleep!"

Ta Tung noticed that the bed was too small to hold two people and he did not say a word. He was cold,

hungry, and dog-tired, and the wounds on the soles of his feet were fiery with pain. His head began to ache and he was developing a fever. But his physical tortures were nothing compared with the trouble in his mind. This stranger, who, according to Li Ming, was his new master and on whom the boy was to depend in future, had turned out to be a cruel tyrant and a thief. He knew Li Ming would not take him back, and even had he wished to do so, Ta Tung would not return to him again. There was nothing left open to the boy except to turn to Li Kang.

Though Li Ming had told him that Li Kang was no more his uncle than he himself was his father, the boy was sure that his tutor would not disappoint him. He waited until the stranger was fast asleep and snoring loudly and then started to return home to the Village of the Li families across the Bridge. He didn't feel strong enough for the journey—his head seemed to be big and heavy and wheeling around, his feet could hardly bear the roughness of the road, and it was with great difficulty that he kept his eyes open—but he struggled hard to make his way through the wind and rain towards the village.

The road was uneven and slippery. Ta Tung fell more than once into puddles of mud and water and progressed very slowly. In the darkness of the night, the journey seemed endless and his destination never to be approaching. After he had got up from each fall he felt weaker and wondered whether he could get up at all after the next one. At last dawn began to break in the east, and the wind and rain gradually ceased with the coming of the early rays of the morning sun. The boy was by now so completely exhausted that he could hardly move forward at all. His hope was fading and he was on the point of collapsing.

"Bow-wow-wow-wow-wow!"

A dog started to bark at him and soon many dogs followed. He raised his head and saw he had come into the village. This gave him fresh courage and energy. He dragged along slowly, making straight for the back entrance of Li Kang's house, he at long last managed to reach there with extreme difficulty.

The back gates were open. Evidently Ta Yu had already gone to work in the rice fields. With a faint cry of joy, Ta Tung stepped over the threshold and fell heavily on the ground. He cried as loudly as he could. "Uncle, Uncle!" but these words were scarcely audible. However, Li Kang's wife was working in the kitchen and heard that somebody seemed to have fallen down at the back gate. For a moment she thought it might be the elderly great-aunt, who must have got up early and had tumbled over the threshold. Running there to her rescue, she was amazed to find Ta Tung lying senseless on the ground in a swoon. The boy was drenched, and water was running from the place where he lay. She called for her husband, who joined her in a moment, and they carried Ta Tung in, removed his wet clothes and put him to bed.

Li Kang had read many medical books and was quite a doctor himself. After examining Ta Tung's pulse, he knew that the boy was only suffering from cold, hunger and fatigue. While he gave him what he needed, his wife went to tell Li Ming about his return.

On the previous day when Li Kang learned that Ta Tung was no longer in the house, he had gone over to his brother to inquire about the matter. Li Ming said that he had sent his son to a friend of his to be trained in a useful profession. Li Kang did not approve of depriving the boy of his classical education and demanded to know what trade it was, but Li Ming refused to answer any

further questions. As a father has a perfect right to send his son to be trained as an apprentice in any profession, Li Kang seemed to be intruding upon other people's business. But now that the boy had come back in such an awful condition, the whole business looked distinctly suspicious.

On hearing of the unexpected return of the boy, Li Ming was greatly embarrassed. He said that he was very angry with his rebellious son who dared to run away from his work. He declared that he would never take him back, and wanted Li Kang and his wife to turn him out so that there would be no other way for the truant but to go back to his new master again. Li Ming did not even offer to come over and look at him.

Ta Tung was soon revived and told his uncle the whole story. Li Kang was furious at the scandalous act of his brother, but on the other hand he was glad the boy had come to him, and told him that from henceforth nothing could separate them again.

The great-aunt, who also welcomed the idea of keeping Ta Tung with them, thought something must be done first.

"Li Ming has done something with a black conscience. He must be dealt with sternly. Ta Tung is nominally his son and he is still responsible for the boy. As we are going to keep his son for him, we must make him pay for the boy's keep . . ."

"No! I won't hear of it!" Li Kang cut in resolutely. "Though I am not well off, one mouth more or less to feed won't make any difference."

"But unless you make a claim on him in public and bring the matter to the notice of the whole village, he can say that you have enticed the boy to run away from his profession to you . . ."

"Let him say that, I don't mind . . ."

"And he may accuse you of intending to swindle the boy of his inheritance."

"We won't touch his dirty money!"

"And legally he could claim back the boy, for you are not Ta Tung's guardian or anything. If he goes to law, you will have no case at all . . ."

"That is a serious consideration," agreed Li Kang at last. "What must I do to keep the boy?"

"You can either forestall him by appealing to law first . . ."

"No! I hate the Magistrate and everybody in his Yamen!"

"Or else ask for the judgement of the whole village."

"Good! Let us gather the villagers together and reveal this scandalous deed of the philanthropist to them all."

He at once sent out invitations to all the elders of the village, requesting them to meet the next morning in the teashop on the main road passing through the village.

A meeting in which all the elders of the village are invited to the teashop has but one meaning. It denotes that there is a serious quarrel and that the matter has to be settled by public opinion. Naturally all those who were privileged to receive the invitation accepted it with pleasure, though with certain misgivings. They hurried to inquire what was the matter, and the village gossips had the time of their lives! Though various versions of the story were circulated, the main facts remained unchangeable. Everybody in the neighbourhood knew the fish thief who lived at The Bridge of Heaven. It seemed that the case against Li Ming was undefendable.

At the meeting in the teashop Li Kang told the whole story. As the rascal of The Bridge of Heaven had been frequently imprisoned for theft, he proposed that since Li Ming had associated with such a notorious criminal, Li

Ming's name should be officially wiped out of their clan book. Though Li Ming's offence was inexcusable, this was perhaps too severe a punishment. The official wiping out of one's name from one's clan book would be the moral equivalent of a death sentence! The villagers would treat the man as an outcast and he would be no longer under the protection of the village.

Li Ming, the defendant, did not offer any defence. He knew that he had no case at all, but he had to come to watch the meeting so that nobody would touch the refreshments, which were always so very tempting. It was obvious that he was going to lose the case, and according to the rules on such occasions, the loser has to pay for the expense of the meeting. If he did not show up he was sure the elders, besides drinking an excessive supply of tea and cracking numerous plates of melon-seeds—which were said to be very helpful in discussions—would heartily enjoy the refreshments which the teashop keeper would offer very freely.

While Li Ming was maintaining silence, a self-appointed counsel, contrary to everybody's expectation, protested hotly

"No! I think this would be very unjust. My venerable elders and my beloved brothers, I think we have been invited here to meddle in a private affair between two brothers. The proverb says: 'It is difficult for the ablest of magistrates to judge a private family affair.' And so I say that we should settle the quarrel by leaving the quarrel unsettled!"

The speaker was no other than the only Cultivated Talent of the village. Ever since the little incident at his house he had been very grateful to Li Ming, whom he believed to be his benefactor. And ever since Li Ming had engaged his brother as the tutor for his boys, he had been on very bad terms with Li Kang, whom he thought

to be his rival. This accounted for his extraordinary speech.

On any other occasion the villagers would have followed Li Kang's suggestion and disregarded that of the Cultivated Talent, but on this particular occasion, when Li Kang was unfortunately one of the quarrelling parties, they had to follow the advice of the Cultivated Talent. When the scholar saw that his words were having effect on the people, he proceeded

"The best way to settle a dispute is 'to make the big matter into a small matter, and then to make the small matter into no matter', as the old saying goes. I advise you to overlook the matter and let us go home in peace."

The villagers knew well enough that they could not possibly be treated to more than a cup of tea, and so were only too eager to be discharged. They stood up and broke into parting greetings. Li Ming felt greatly relieved and prepared to leave with joy. Li Kang was amazed at this outburst and felt he had been grossly wronged. He called out in a loud voice

"My venerable elders and my beloved brothers! If you leave the matter unsettled like this, I am afraid each of you will have to settle his own account with the teashop keeper. For, if you think my brother is not in the wrong, nobody is going to pay the bill. I am not in the wrong, and you don't suppose I'm going to pay it, do you?"

This was a master stroke! As Li Kang was certainly not in the wrong, they could not possibly ask him to pay the bill. It was apparent that if they spared Li Ming they were sparing him at their own expense. Several of them began at once to argue with the Cultivated Talent, and no matter how ardently he defended the case, it was unanimously carried that Li Ming should pay all expenses involved, and be held financially responsible for the bringing up of the boy, though Li Kang was to have his custody

'Woe is the day,' thought Li Ming. 'I'd rather there was no defence and my name was wiped out from the clan book! Then I would have nothing to do with that wretched boy and my unworthy brother.'

He counted the tea bowls and the empty melon-seed plates, and checked the account carefully. Finding there was nothing about which he could pick a bone with the teashop keeper, he paid the bill reluctantly. As he pensively took leave of the man, he felt sore as he reflected upon the big sum of money he had been forced to spend, and he found it more maddening still to consider that all these people had gone away without even having said 'thank you' to him!

When Li Kang came home and told Ta Tung the good news, the boy asked eagerly:

"May I be allowed to stay here with you now, uncle?"

"Of course, Ta Tung! In fact, that was the decision of the elders of our village," replied Li Kang.

"Then the man at The Bridge of Heaven won't come and claim me, will he, uncle?"

"Certainly not! He is a thief whom your . . . your . . . my brother tried to bribe to take you away from here. He has nothing to do with you, Ta Tung!"

The boy was happy beyond words, and maintained silence for a while before saying thoughtfully:

"I don't think we need accept my . . . my father's money for my expenses. I think I can work to support myself . . . and later on, perhaps, I can support you as well, my uncle, and my aunt. I am very strong and . . ."

"No, my Ta Tung! You needn't worry about that. Of course we won't take any of his dirty ill-gotten money! But there is no need for you to support yourself yet. I will look after you, my dear Ta Tung!"

"Will you really, uncle? I am glad I have come to you at last, dear uncle!"

Ta Tung was now settled down at Li Kang's house. He was given a room next to that of the great-aunt, who said it would be more convenient for her to look after the boy. Early in the morning and late at night the elderly lady would call Ta Tung to her room to ask him how he was feeling and whether there was anything she could do for him. Then she would ask the boy to do a kind massage to her stiff back by striking it with his fist lightly. Besides this routine work of massage in the morning and evening, Ta Tung was ordered to do all kinds of odd jobs and to go errands for her. In short, she found that she could look after Ta Tung with great convenience.

Now that Shiao Ming no longer came to study, the schoolroom was rid of a trouble-maker. Li Kang could therefore concentrate his attention on teaching Ta Tung, who, with fresh hope and encouragement, now studied harder and made quicker progress than ever.

CHAPTER IV

*"How short is a man's life!
Like a drop of dew,
His time is over
While the day is yet new!"*

LEAVING the teashop, Li Ming decided to make one more journey to The Bridge of Heaven. He called upon the man in the hut and demanded his money back because the so-called master had not looked after his apprentice properly. The man received him very coldly, and to Li Ming's threat to take him to the magistrate because of his breaking of the contract, the rascal retorted that, being a frequent lodger at the district prison, he had no objection to that at all. When Li Ming's strong words were answered

by bad language, the philanthropist began to realise that his twenty-five thousand pieces of cash were as good as sunk at the bottom of the Eastern Sea.

During his whole life, Li Ming had always been successful in his financial dealings. It is true that now and again one of his extremely good bargains, one that he had driven a little too hard, would turn out to be a very bad one, but that was a comparatively rare occurrence. Therefore he could not but look back on the adoption and the bringing up of Ta Tung with profound regret. It had been a completely bad bargain from beginning to end. The only consolation was that now, thanks to Heaven and thanks to Earth, it was at an end!

Li Ming had caught a chill while returning home in the rain on his last trip, and this second journey in the early Spring wind made him much worse. While Ta Tung recovered almost immediately, Li Ming was obliged to take to his bed, and soon became critically ill. It was against his principles to consult good doctors who were too expensive for him, so a quack whose charge was extremely modest, and who always supplied the medicine at bargain prices, was called directly he began to realise the seriousness of his condition.

Either the invalid was mourning too much over the financial loss on Ta Tung, or else the medicine he had taken had begun to work in the wrong direction, for Li Ming became much worse the next day. He was suffering from a mighty thirst that nothing could quench. He lost his voice, and within ten days could not make himself articulate. The quack was again called in. He averred it was just a severe cold and that an increased dose according to his former prescription was all that the invalid needed. He supplied a much bigger quantity of the same medicine at an even cheaper rate and advised that it should be taken at shorter intervals

Now it was quite evident that the medicine was highly effective. For, after each successive dose of it, Li Ming's condition became more dangerous than before. Li Kang came to see him and warned him that herbs and roots prescribed by quacks were not only unreliable but also harmful. He suggested that a good doctor from the city ought to be sent for at once. Li Ming could not protest in words, for he was now completely dumb, but he shook his head as vigorously as his condition allowed. Fearing his miming protest was not sufficient, he signalled for a brush-pen and paper. With trembling hands he managed to scrawl indistinctly the words "no use" again and again.

Several more days went by and it became apparent that Li Ming, though only fifty-eight years of age, was approaching his end. All the necessary preparations were in progress. His bed curtains were removed so that, according to superstitious belief, he would not be confined in a prison in the other world. His bedroom windows and doors were closed, so that no evil spirit could come to lead him astray. A little oil lamp was lit beside his bed to give him a guiding light for his last long and dark journey. Paper money was prepared in abundance and would be burned the moment he reached the stage of passing away, so that he could bribe the Messenger of Death and perhaps even the Tribunal too. His coffin, which had been built years ago, was taken out from the remote corner of the barn to be varnished, and mourning dresses for the widow and orphan and other near relatives were cut and already in the making.

Li Ming observed some of these proceedings with great uneasiness, and his wife noticed that he had something on his mind which he wanted to tell her. She asked him numerous questions and most of her suggestions were ridiculous. He kept on shaking his head and at last had recourse to brush-pen and paper. He could scarcely write

now, but with great effort he just managed to scrawl some characters, which were deciphered by the help of Li Kang with great difficulty as signifying "Lotus Fragrance". Below these two words Li Ming was obviously trying to write something more, but unfortunately his mental powers were by now exhausted and he could no longer write another stroke.

Although it was strange that Li Ming should, at this moment, pick out of all persons Lotus Fragrance, his wife's niece, to be the recipient of his death bed message, yet it seemed not unreasonable that the girl, as his prospective daughter-in-law, should be the person whom he most wished to see before he passed away. His wife immediately despatched a special messenger to the city to acquaint her mother, Madame Wu, of this news and Lotus Fragrance, escorted by her grandmother, arrived at the house that very evening. Madame Wu was now seventy-five years old and her health was still unimpaired by old age. Li Ming's wife received her mother with mixed feelings, while Madame Wu comforted her daughter as best she could, announcing that she must return to the city in a day or two because her daughter-in-law, for some reason or other, refused to accompany them to the country.

When Lotus Fragrance was taken to see Li Ming, he shook his head weakly and nobody could make out what he was trying to say. He seemed to be extremely anxious to say something about Lotus Fragrance, but all possible ways of conveying his meaning seemed to have failed owing to his exhausted condition. When it was found that questions asked about the girl were distressing rather than comforting him, they took care not to mention Lotus Fragrance to him again.

Early in the morning on the following day everything indicated that the end was at hand. Li Ming glanced at the tightly-closed papered window on which the sun was

shining, and then turned his gaze to the oil lamp which, with its double wick, was burning brightly and steadily. While everybody was waiting for the critical moment to arrive, he was struggling to hold on longer. He tried with all his strength to raise his hand, but only managed to stretch out two fingers. He then looked appealingly at his wife and at his outstretched fingers, seemingly to ask his wife to do something about this movement. She tried to put his hand and fingers back, but no, this was not what he wanted.

It soon became evident that he was indicating the number "two", and his wife again began to make conjectures.

"Do you want to be laid here for two days before being put into the coffin?"

No.

"Do you want two Buddhist priests?

No.

"Two Taoist priests?"

No.

"Two pavilions in the funeral procession?"

No.

"Two tombstones?"

No.

She tried every possible question that was connected with the number "two" and then went on to increase it tenfold and a hundredfold. After failing to secure his assent to anything that was connected even with two thousand, twenty thousand or two hundred thousand, she suddenly thought of something else. In the meantime, Li Ming was bearing his sufferings heroically and seemed determined not to close his eyes till his last wish was complied with.

His wife called Li Kang to see his brother, and she said triumphantly

"You want to see the number two of your family, don't you? There he is!"

No. Li Ming still held out his two fingers.

She then called for Ta Tung and made him stand side by side with Shiao Ming

"You want your two sons to see you off, don't you?"

No. She had to give it up. But Lotus Fragrance noticed that the dying man was staring at the lamp.

"There must be something wrong with the lamp," she said. "His eyes are fixed on the wicks . . ."

"I know," Shiao Ming burst out with a happy smile. The boy understood his father's economical principle in life. He went to the lamp, separated the double wick and put out the fire on one of them. He came to his father and said-

"The sun is shining. We mustn't burn two wicks at the same time. A single wick is more than sufficient. Isn't it, father?"

After all, it is only one's own flesh and blood who can understand one's innermost feelings. Li Ming smiled faintly, closed his eyes and let out his last breath.

Though Li Ming did not leave any sort of dying command, his widow knew it must be his wish to be as economical in the funeral service as possible. But her mother, Madame Wu, who had now decided to stay a little longer in the country, took over the responsibility from her daughter. She ordered that sacrifices be performed for seven times seven days by twenty-one Buddhist priests, and that on the day of the funeral, the procession should be escorted by a big retinue of banner bearers, etc., three pavilions, two musical bands, twenty-four Taoist priests, besides the Buddhist priests and thirty-two coffin-bearers.

During these forty-nine days, the home resembled a theatre rather than a residence. All the walls, eaves, ceil-

ings, were covered with decorative panels on which there were numerous patterns made up with pure white cloths folded together. Dozens of temporary servants were engaged and a musical band was seated just inside the main gate to play a short air whenever a visitor and mourner came in or went out.

The Middle Chamber was divided into two compartments by hanging a big white curtain down the centre. The coffin was placed behind the curtain, which was covered with pieces of white silk panels inscribed with poetical mourning couplets. In the centre of the curtains was a picture of the deceased. As photography was not then known, the portrait was painted by a special artisan—in no circumstances an artist—whose sole profession it was to paint corpses before they were put into their coffins. Below the picture, in front of the curtain, three square tables were placed close to each other. White and green candles and various sacrificial vessels were disposed all over the tables, and right in the middle stood the incense burner. The Buddhist priests were seated on the two sides of the table reading Sanskrit scriptures and playing sacred instruments.

A big cushion lay centrally before the tables, and on this the mourners would kneel in order to pay their respects. To the left, on a straw mattress just before the white curtain, Shiao Ming and Ta Tung, dressed in white gowns with hempen jackets over them, had to kneel down whenever a mourner approached to pay respect to the dead. The widow and Lotus Fragrance must kneel on the right behind the curtain, where the coffin stood. They were obliged also to wail a little every time there was anybody coming. The widow's mourning suit consisted of a white coat and skirt and a hempen over-jacket, while the future daughter-in-law wore a white coat and skirt only. But the little girl's buttons and button fasteners were all in

red—a gay colour which indicated that her own parents were still alive.

During the first few days, it was a rather strenuous task for the widow and children to kneel down repeatedly, for there was a constant flow of visitors directly after the formal announcement of death. It was even more trying still for the widow, who had to weep aloud almost incessantly. In the city the rich families used to hire professional mourners to do the weeping for the female folks, but in the country this was impossible, as the female visitors would invariably come behind the curtain to say a few condoling words to the bereft ones and therefore would be liable to discover the substitution.

But after the rush of the first few days things began to quieten down a little. The widow could sit down and have a little rest now and again when there was no visitor. The children, indeed, would even go a step further by stealing into the garden to have some fun on their own. The band at the gate was a great help. It would actually announce the arrival of every visitor, and therefore gave good, though short, warning to the three truants, who had to keep their ears alert for the signal. Although Lotus Fragrance was affianced to one of the boys, and although they were such near relatives, they had never met before. Both Li Ming and the girl's mother seemed to have been very successful in preventing the children from seeing each other, in spite of Madame Wu's wish that they should be acquainted as soon as possible.

Lotus Fragrance had heard from her grandmother a great deal of her betrothed, Shiao Ming; perhaps a great deal too much. According to the description of Madame Wu, Shiao Ming must be the most handsome lad in the world, besides being the best behaved, the most kind-hearted and the most intelligent one alive. Of Ta Tung,

however, report seemed to indicate that whatever Shiao Ming had this boy must have lacked, and it would almost certainly be a deadly misfortune for anyone to know him at all.

Being an only child, Lotus Fragrance was very much spoilt and had a rather rebellious nature. She often disagreed with her mother and never once agreed with her grandmother, whom she disliked intensely simply because the elderly woman doted on her. Madame Wu's praises of Shiao Ming, alas! had just the opposite effect, and Lotus Fragrance soon acquired a very strong prejudice against the boy.

Though she used to argue with her grandmother about Ta Tung, who, she said, couldn't possibly be so dreadful as the old woman avowed, Lotus Fragrance, nevertheless, imagined him to be a clumsy, rough and ill-bred rustic, with whom it must be very unpleasant to play. Now that she had become fairly intimate with both boys, she gradually formed her own opinion of them. The clever and handsome Shiao Ming became more and more disappointing to her, while Ta Tung rose higher and higher in her esteem every day. Soon she began to think that her grandmother must have got either their names or their personalities mixed up.

The one thing Lotus Fragrance could not bear about Shiao Ming was his possessiveness and his air of authority over her. To her he seemed to be the most conceited and selfish boy in the world. He appeared to regard everybody else in general as his inferior—and in particular Lotus Fragrance, whom he treated as no more than a slave girl. Coming from the city, the girl had brought with her many foreign novelties and up-to-date toys, such as india-rubber balls and celluloid dolls, which were of course never heard of in the country. Whereas Ta Tung invariably asked politely for her permission before he would venture

to touch or examine them, Shiao Ming just snatched them from either Ta Tung's or her hands whenever he liked, as if he had a prior right to all her possessions.

Whenever she could not have her own way Lotus Fragrance liked to report to her grandmother at once What especially maddened her was Shiao Ming's habit of reporting his own selfish grievances to his mother even more than she did, and her grandmother's habit of commanding her to surrender in his favour, no matter who was in the right.

Both boys adored the india-rubber balls. Ta Tung, wishing to possess one, offered to make a very nice cock-feathered Chien-tze—a sort of shuttlecock used in a kicking game—which he proposed to teach her to play, in exchange for one of her smaller rubber balls. She instantly agreed and was looking forward to learning the new game as well as to watching how the Chien-tze was made. But Shiao Ming simply selected a big and coloured ball—her favourite one—and said that was the one *he* must have.

When they went to report this disagreement, over the cause of which they both fell to fighting and crying, Madame Wu told Lotus Fragrance that she must not quarrel with Shiao Ming, and that, as a compromise, they should be allowed to share the ball. Both wishing to have their full share, they played with it henceforward incessantly.

In the garden near the ground where they played there had once been a big old cedar tree, since hewn down because Li Ming considered that it obstructed the sunshine essential to the flourishing of his household vegetables. There was a hole—nearly two feet in depth and only a few inches in diameter—among its dry roots, and this had always been a menace to ball-players. The india-rubber ball bounced much higher and more freely than

the cotton ones the boys were used to playing with, and one day, to the chagrin of Lotus Fragrance who was watching, Shiao Ming sent it straight into the hole before any of them could catch it.

Shiao Ming said calmly that it was no matter. He could fish it out with his fishing line and hook, as he always did whenever his cotton ball fell into it. But soon he found out with dismay that the slippery rubber ball seemed to have no regard whatever for the hook. He at once lost his patience and temper and, throwing away his fishing line, he began to curse and swear. Little Lotus Fragrance was heartbroken; she cried, and demanded that Shiao Ming must get her ball for her at all costs. Then Shiao Ming turned his anger upon the girl and abused her to his heart's content.

While these two were quarrelling, Ta Tung went to the well and soon came back with a big bucket full of water. Without a word he poured the water into the hole, and the ball, floating on the water, came rolling out of its hiding place directly the hole was flooded and overflowed. Lotus Fragrance picked up her treasure at once and looked at the boy with an admiration and fondness that she had never felt towards anybody before.

From henceforth Ta Tung was her hero. The fact that her grandmother never said a nice word about him made her love him all the more. She was now thoroughly convinced that Ta Tung was a kind of persecuted victim, and nothing touched the girl's heart more deeply than her discovery that the nature of this wronged victim was the very opposite of all that was said of him, and that he himself was so utterly indifferent to the wrongs under which he was suffering.

Lotus Fragrance, apart from being a little spoilt, was a very nice and attractive girl, and as her dresses and manners belonged strictly to the city, no country lass

could compare with her. It was natural that Ta Tung should be fascinated by her as much as she was by him. At first she always took the side of Ta Tung whenever they were playing together, but later on she even tried to avoid Shiao Ming and sought to be alone with Ta Tung. Shiao Ming, however, was very jealous and would never leave them together for a second.

The only time they could enjoy being together without the interference of Shiao Ming was very early in the morning. Shiao Ming had a habit of lying awake in bed for a long time before getting up, and as he was sleeping in the same room with his mother, they would stay in bed and talk about all sorts of childish and silly things for a great part of the early morning. On the other hand, Ta Tung was obliged to get up very early. Shortly before dawn the great aunt, who was in the next room, would wake him up by her incessant coughing. As soon as it was light, she would call Ta Tung over to ask how he had slept the previous night and whether he felt cold or hot, etc. Then she would order him to do his daily work for her—the massage—which sometimes took half an hour. But if Ta Tung could escape and remain out of her sight after the massage, he would be entirely free for an hour or two before he went to the study to get ready for the day's work. It was always at this time that he managed to be alone with Lotus Fragrance.

Lotus Fragrance, thrilled with the sunshine in the open air, with the wild birds, lofty trees and wild flowers, also managed to get up much earlier than she would do in the city, to take a walk with Ta Tung out into the fields. She adored the open country, which was particularly beautiful as the spring days grew warmer and everything became fresh and green.

Lotus Fragrance had never seen fish except cooked in a dish and placed on her dinner-table. So it was arranged

that Ta Tung was to take her to a fish pond not far away, where he said she could see carp swimming. But on that particular morning the Great-aunt seemed determined to mar the boy's happiness. Her gout seemed much worse and she kept Ta Tung to do the massage on her back much longer than usual. While the boy's mind was eagerly bent on getting to Lotus Fragrance, his little fist was striking in a rather half-hearted manner. Fixing his eyes on an old painting of a tiger hanging in her room, he was thinking of nothing but the happy time he was to have with his play-mate.

"Strike harder, Ta Tung!" The elderly lady was not satisfied.

"Yes, Great-aunt."

He struck harder, but in a rather peculiar way. The painting of the tiger before his eyes began to direct his hand, and his fist started to travel in the direction of the brush work of the artist. Ta Tung did the tiger's head first, and then its body, which fairly fell in the centre of the old lady's back. Then came the tail. In the original picture it stuck up high in the air, and Ta Tung, while striking harder and harder according to the orders he had received, tried to copy the forceful tail by striking vehemently upwards until he was actually boxing on the old lady's neck and the back of her skull.

"Hey, what are you doing?" the old lady cried with pain.

"Oh! I'm sorry!"

While the old woman was scolding him, Ta Tung ran out of the room.

Lotus Fragrance was waiting impatiently for him in the garden. They went out to the pond and saw huge carp swimming swiftly to and fro just below the surface of the light green water. It was something which greatly entranced the city girl. Here, under a big weeping willow,

the branches of which seemed to be caressing them gently with their sweetly smelling young leaves, Lotus Fragrance suggested that they should sit down and rest a while. The grass was glistening with dew and Ta Tung disagreed

"No, it's too wet . . ."

"But I have a handkerchief," said the girl. "I'll spread it out on the grass It is large enough for two. You can share it with me."

"No, I don't mind the dew."

"But the handkerchief is too big for me . . ."

"You can fold it and make it thicker . . ."

"But it is still big enough for two men folded . . ."

"Then fold it twice. So much the better for you." And to save any further argument he sat down on the grass first.

Lotus Fragrance looked at the obstinate but kind-hearted boy with mock scorn but secret admiration. She folded her handkerchief and sat on it closely next to him.

"You headstrong, stupid boy, sometimes I like you for it!" She looked at Ta Tung intently.

"Do you?" said the boy blushing, and looked into the water Then he added hesitatingly: "I like you, too!"

"Do you really?" the girl exclaimed joyfully and unabashed "How much do you like me?"

"Very much" The reply was scarcely audible.

"Bite my arm," said the girl, as she rolled up her sleeve and presented her right arm to him. "Bite it as hard as you think you like me"

Ta Tung did not dare to raise his head. He fondled the snow-white little arm tenderly and bit it gently

"Is that all you like me?" asked the disappointed girl
"You do not like me at all!"

"I do!" protested the boy. "I was afraid you could not bear it"

"Bite again, then Let me see how much you like me"

Ta Tung bit the lovely arm again, this time much harder. He looked immediately at the place where he had bitten, and was nearly heartbroken to see four distinct tooth marks deeply impressed in the skin. But Lotus Fragrance was still dissatisfied.

"Is that all?"

"Yes!" said Ta Tung decisively. He could not bear to go any further.

"Then you do not like me half as much as I like you!" She covered up her arm with disappointment. "Now, give me your arm, and I'll show you how much I like you!"

Ta Tung stole a glance at the girl with misgivings and then reluctantly thrust out his right hand.

"No!" cried the girl in surprise. "Right for the female, and left for the male. Don't you know the rule?"

Ta Tung uncovered his left arm and said nothing. Lotus Fragrance took it and, before biting it, asked,

"Are you afraid of pain?"

"Certainly not," answered Ta Tung contemptuously. He turned to look the other way.

Lotus Fragrance first had a hard and long look at Ta Tung and then bit his arm with shivering adoration. Without loosing hold with her teeth, she asked:

"Do you feel the pain?"

"No," answered Ta Tung heroically.

"Do you feel it now?" She bit even harder.

"No!"

"And now?"

"Ouch!" Ta Tung snatched his arm away from the firm grip of her teeth.

"Did I hurt you?" She seized the arm to look and saw there was a tiny scratch. It began to bleed a little. "I'm very sorry, but you shouldn't snatch it away."

Ta Tung rubbed the wound carelessly and looked into the water. He murmured. "Never mind. It's all right."

Lotus Fragrance sucked the wound—it was not very much of a wound—and pressed her cheek tenderly on it. Ta Tung felt very uncomfortable and withdrew his arm. He turned to look at Lotus Fragrance and perceived that there was a tiny spot of blood on her right cheek.

“You’ve got a spot of blood on your cheek.”

“Where?” Lotus Fragrance put her face closer to his. “Wipe it away for me.”

Ta Tung had never been so intimate with a girl before and was greatly embarrassed. He wiped out the spot of blood with his fingers hurriedly and didn’t know what to do next.

“Hey! What are you doing there?” Shiao Ming’s voice broke the little romance from a distance. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere, and now I’ve caught you!”

“You are a nuisance,” cried Lotus Fragrance.

Ta Tung tried to stand up, but Lotus Fragrance dragged him down and kept him seated by her side.

“Sit down!” she commanded. “Why should you be afraid of him?”

“I’m not afraid of him, but I don’t want to stay here when he has come. Let’s go home.”

“Look here, Ta Tung. You say you are not afraid of him, but will you protect me from him?”

“Certainly.”

“And will you do anything to him if I tell you to?”

“Willingly.”

Shiao Ming came nearer and began to pour out a torrent of bad language over the innocent couple. Lotus Fragrance, being brought up in a good family in the city, had never heard such filthy words before and felt grossly insulted. With tears in her eyes, she got up and said appealingly to Ta Tung:

“If you like me at all, throw him into the water for me.”

Ta Tung had had quite enough of Shiao Ming and was only too glad to find some excuse to do something desperate to this vulgar intruder. He leapt to his feet and, with one bound, had caught the retreating boy tightly in his arms. Lifting him with perfect ease, he threw Shiao Ming into the pond. Yelling at the top of his voice, Shiao Ming fell with a big splash. Fortunately the water near the bank of the pond was shallow, so Shiao Ming only swallowed one or two mouthfuls of water and got thoroughly wet, but managed to climb out easily enough without any help from Ta Tung.

Wailing loudly and incessantly, Shiao Ming walked straight home to report. The two conspirators followed "the waterman" at a short distance, and were quite prepared to answer for the consequences now that they had had satisfaction on their enemy. Between loud sobs, Shiao Ming told Madame Wu and his mother how he had found Lotus Fragrance in the act of "eloping" with Ta Tung, and "making love shamelessly" on the bank of a little pond. He said that he "gently" told them to come home, and that Ta Tung, helped by Lotus Fragrance, pushed him into the water while he was innocently unaware of their wicked intention.

Madame Wu, while mildly scolding her naughty granddaughter for her scandalous behaviour, ordered her daughter to send "that dreadful fisherman's boy" to Li Kang, and never allow him to come into the house again. Although, she said, it was not nice for her deceased son-in-law to have only one "mourning orphan" instead of two, it was quite unimportant during the remaining days of the sacrifice. On the day of the great funeral the boy could join the procession, and everybody would see that there were two "mourning orphans" after all.

Though Lotus Fragrance was forbidden to see Ta Tung under penalty of a good thrashing, the girl knew it

was only meant to frighten her, so she still contrived to meet her sweetheart early every morning. In spite of Li Kang's dislike of the girl, he was a good-hearted man and would never do anything to spoil the children's happy meetings. He advised the boy not to see the girl too often, but decided to tolerate the rendezvous, as the saying goes, "with one eye open and the other eye closed".

After the forty-nine days of sacrifice had gone, during which time Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance got to be extremely fond of each other and indeed became inseparable, the great event—the funeral—took place. Madame Wu wanted a really first-class funeral, and she did not spare any expense though the money was not hers. The procession was truly magnificent and the country people from all the villages around never saw its peer. It was but a little over half a mile from the house to the family burial ground, but under Madame Wu's orders the procession was to take a wide round-about route covering some ten miles. The funeral feast, to which nearly everybody of the village came, was the most splendid feast the villagers ever heard of, and everyone who partook of it was allowed to take home a big piece of the sacrificial pork.

Yet in spite of all this splendour and munificence, which cost quite a good part of Li Ming's fortune, the villagers were not at all pleased with the funeral. The matter on which Madame Wu had a difference of opinion with the elders of the village was over the question of the coffin-bearers. Of course with a funeral on such a great scale it would be quite out of keeping with the whole scheme, and indeed utterly ridiculous, to have less than thirty-two coffin-bearers. In the country the bearers are always members of the same village, and they do this not for money but for "fun", though one may wonder how they

could have fun on such an occasion. There are, usually, not more than eight of them in a village, and Li Ming was considered fortunate when they said they could get together, including some reserves and novices, as many as sixteen. But, no! Madame Wu must have her way. She suggested that she might hire sixteen more professionals from the city.

Now this, to the villagers, was a great insult. To be mixed up with professional coffin-bearers, who were no more than beggars and rascals, represented an indignity that could never be washed away. The elders of the village argued with Madame Wu for a long time, and when they found themselves unable to persuade her to reduce the number to sixteen, they told her that she could get as many professionals from the city as she wished, but that the villagers would never henceforth lift a finger for Li Ming's family.

Madame Wu was only too ready to answer the challenge, and she told the country folks that that would suit her splendidly. She talked with her daughter about the undesirability of living in the country and proposed that for the benefit of Shiao Ming, who needed a good education in the city, they should leave the old homestead and live near her so that she could look after them properly. Li Ming's widow was as obedient as a daughter as she had been as a wife, and whatever her mother told her to do she always willingly complied with. In fact, with the death of her husband, she really would not have known what to do without her mother.

Soon after the funeral was over, Madame Wu and Lotus Fragrance went back to the city. At her departure Lotus Fragrance shed many a tear and implored Ta Tung to manage to get to the city as soon and often as he could. She said she would be particularly unhappy without seeing him now that Shiao Ming was surely going to live

somewhere near her. Ta Tung was silent, for he realised it was a very difficult thing to promise, but at last he said he would bear her words in mind and never forget her.

While Ta Tung continued his studies under Li Kang, Shiao Ming, pending his mother's removal to the city, where he would be able to receive a much better education, was having a temporary holiday from studying. Li Ming had left behind him an enormous fortune, for the most part in rice fields. The little ready money was far from being sufficient to cover the funeral expenses. The widow, with the guidance and help of her mother, had to sell a certain amount of land in order to pay numerous bills, for each of which Madame Wu could give an adequate explanation. Another portion of land was also sold to raise a lump sum to establish them in the city, and the rest was kept to cover the daily expenses of the house and Shiao Ming's education.

The great-aunt, having heard that Li Ming's properties were being disposed of by the widow and that nothing had been bequeathed to Ta Tung, who was nominally the elder son of the deceased, thought it most unfair to the boy. She strongly urged Li Kang to put forward a claim for Ta Tung.

"You must call the elders of the village together again. How could they ignore my poor Ta Tung altogether? In the clan book, Ta Tung's name is entered directly under that of Li Ming, as his son. Nobody will dare to say anything against his legal claim for an inheritance."

Li Kang smiled.

"I've many reasons not to bother about this. First, if Ta Tung is going to be a useful person in society, he will have no need of money. Secondly, if Ta Tung is to be dependent on an inheritance, he will starve even if he inherits all his father's fortune. Besides, a young man with plenty of money is bound to ruin himself. Ta Tung has

already been made to waste a lot of his time because his father left too much money to be spent on his magnificent funeral, and I must see that no more of the boy's time is wasted. If he continues to study under me, he'll be in a much better position than having inherited a fortune!"

"Ha! ha!" the great-aunt roared with laughter. "You are indeed an idiotic bookworm! Even if Ta Tung acquires from you all your learning, he cannot be better off than you are—a useless, hard-up gentleman-at-large! When Ta Tung grows up, he will never forgive you for not looking after his property."

"Perhaps we are taking too much for granted. We should let Ta Tung say for himself whether he wants anything from his father." And he called the boy to come.

"No!" protested the great-aunt. "What does a boy of eight know? Most probably he won't dare to ask for anything."

"Now, Ta Tung, as your father's properties are being disposed of, do you wish to claim anything as your inheritance? I do not want to prejudice your decision by making any remarks, and you have a perfectly legal right to claim anything within reason as your inheritance. But the point is do you really want anything from them?"

"Yes, uncle, I do!"

"No!" Li Kang exclaimed, mortified.

"You mustn't interfere, Kang," cried the great-aunt triumphantly. Turning to Ta Tung, she said "I knew you would, my boy. Your decision is final. Neither I nor your uncle ought to interfere with your wish. Whatever may be your claim, provided it is reasonable, we'll do our utmost to see that you get it."

"Can I really have anything that I want . . . ?"

"Provided it is within reason, of course," she put in.

"But it was understood that you didn't want anything from your father, Ta Tung" Li Kang tried to interfere

"But I have had this in my mind for a long time I thought, as it belonged to Shiao Ming, they wouldn't give it to me."

"I'm ashamed of you, Ta Tung." Li Kang was greatly annoyed. "I thought you knew better!"

"You mustn't interfere with the boy's wish. His decision is final." The great-aunt then turned to Ta Tung. "As you are the elder son, you are entitled to enjoy a preferential right over Shiao Ming. Tell us what you want—estate or ready cash?"

"None of those, but the white kitten in the kitchen," said the boy firmly.

"What?" Li Kang jumped up with joy.

"Shiao Ming always said it was his pet and wouldn't allow me to touch it. Do you really think that if I claim this kitten and nothing else as my inheritance, they will allow me to have it?"

"Of course!" Li Kang readily answered.

"No, what do you want the cat for?" The great-aunt was disappointed. "You can buy a thousand kittens with a tiny part of the money . . ."

"Ta Tung's decision is final, as you said yourself," Li Kang exclaimed. "But, Ta Tung, I thought you never cared for pets."

"No, I don't care for it at all."

"Then why do you want it? Don't you think you can do better with the money?" suggested the great-aunt. "I will buy a white kitten for you . . ."

"No, I want to take that kitten away from Shiao Ming because he tormented the poor animal so much that it nearly died on several occasions. Old Wang wouldn't let me give it away. He said Shiao Ming would blame him if he did."

In spite of the great-aunt's strong protests, Ta Tung's wish was fulfilled. As soon as he received his heirloom,

he parted with it at once by giving it to a gentle child who lived near-by.

Soon Madame Wu found for her daughter a good and suitable house near her own. Li Ming's widow moved there shortly after it had been redecorated. Now that Madame Wu had her daughter and grandson with her in the city, she began to look for a good teacher for the child. It must be said that however dearly Madame Wu and her daughter loved Shiao Ming, they never for a second intended to neglect the education of the boy. A very famous scholar in the city was immediately engaged to be his private tutor, and Lotus Fragrance was allowed to join him as a "by-pupil". Histories and Classics were taught, and the teacher was requested to explain the meaning of the books to his students. The scholar happened to be a man of letters who was not at all an eloquent speaker. Whenever he was trying to explain the meaning of the classical texts, he merely read them aloud over and over again in a droning voice and with vigorous nodding and shaking of his bald head. To him, the movement of his head was extremely explicit.

Shiao Ming could not grasp the meaning of the classics. It must be said that such works are usually very dry, and apt to send inattentive youngsters to sleep. Once, while the tutor was reading and explaining a lesson which entranced himself, he cast a casual glance at his pupils and noticed that Shiao Ming, with eyes half-closed, was on the point of dozing off. Absent-mindedly the teacher said-

"Aren't you charmed by the beauty of this passage, Shiao Ming? It's most exquisite! Just watch my head."

Half asleep, Shiao Ming lifted his eyes and saw in front of him the bald head making a circular movement vigorously. Dreamily he answered

"Yes, sir."

"What do you make of it?"

"A round, bright and smooth head just like a lighted lantern!"

Shiao Ming was unjustly punished for this innocent remark which was made when he was very sleepy. After this it was natural that the boy should often play truant. When the teacher's repeated requests that the boy should be sent to him more regularly were always ignored, he decided to resign. Several more tutors were engaged in succession, one after another, but all of them ended in failure.

While Shiao Ming made little progress in his studies, Lotus Fragrance practically did the work of two students. Besides learning all her lessons by heart, she always managed to overhear and pick up everything the teacher taught Shiao Ming. When this became known by their elders, Lotus Fragrance was deprived of her chance to study. Remembering Lotus Fragrance's extraordinary nativity, Li Ming's widow complained to her mother that as long as the girl was allowed to go to school with her son, there was no chance of Shiao Ming learning anything. She was tactful enough not to mention the girl's "eight characters", but she pointed out to her mother the silly superstition that a girl would take away the wisdom of a boy when they were studying together. Madame Wu, therefore, withdrew her grand-daughter from the school, to the bitter disappointment of Lotus Fragrance. Her mother also was disappointed, but Madame Wu said that they must place Shiao Ming's interests before those of anybody else.

With Lotus Fragrance gone, Shiao Ming would have made good progress had he been a little less unfortunate with his subsequent tutors. For a number of years that followed it became almost a fixed custom for Shiao Ming to have a new teacher at the beginning of each year; and before the Festival of the Dragon Boat, which is celebrated

on the fifth day of the fifth moon, the inconsistent teacher was bound to give notice that he could not continue his services for the coming term. The excuse invariably given for their resignation was that something unexpected had happened in their family, though Madame Wu said she knew that some of them were bachelors, and had no family of any sort at all.

With each new tutor, Shiao Ming always demanded a new set of text books. And they were so dull to him that he began to be bored with them before he had studied the first few pages. These discarded text books he gave to Lotus Fragrance, whose mother would do her best to teach the girl to read them. Lotus Fragrance was a quick student. Besides reading all Shiao Ming's discarded books she learned from her mother, who was a very good artist, the art of painting. Very soon she became as good an artist as her talented mother. However, both Madame Wu and Li Ming's widow were always thinking seriously about Shiao Ming's future and would never forget about his education. But they considered him still a baby, and thought it would not be too late for him to start in earnest the year after next. As there was always a year after next which seemed fast approaching yet which never actually arrived, the boy thus passed away the best years of his youth in doing nothing besides playing and calling on friends and relatives day after day with his mother and grandmother.

CHAPTER V

*"The prosperity or the adversity of a nation
Is the responsibility of every soul of the country"*

WHEN Ta Tung began to grow up and to be receptive of the affairs of the country and the world, Li Kang

slowly filled the boy's head with dangerous ideas. The tutor told him that China, which used to be called the Celestial Empire, was not what it ought to be He related to his pupil the cause and effect of the Opium War, told him about the occupation of Tientsin, and also the attacking of the Imperial Palaces and the burning and looting of the Round Bright Park of Yuan-Ming-Yuan by the allied forces of Britain and France in the tenth year of the reign of Emperor Hsien Feng (1860) Gradually, Ta Tung learned to study the map, and was grieved to see that Burma, Annam and the Liu Chiu Islands, which had all belonged to China, were now taken respectively by Britain, France and Japan The country had suffered these losses, he was told by his tutor, because of one woman She was none other than the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi.

Li Kang was not an idealist who merely talked. He contributed as much as he could—sometimes more than he could really afford—to all the secret societies whose aim was to save the country He also corresponded with progressive leaders of the people and even with some of their foreign friends In those days the Post Office was not established and private letters had to be conveyed by private organisations called "Letter Agencies" whose charge was very high Letter writing at that time was considered an extravagance

As all the Letter Agencies were in the city, Ta Tung was entrusted with the dispatch and collection of Li Kang's letters. Ta Tung's frequent trips to the city provided him with ample opportunities to see Lotus Fragrance, who had begun to grow up into a lovely young woman However, their meetings were short and unexciting. They never succeeded in exchanging more than a few words of friendly greeting, though they were dying to go much beyond that

The reason why the boy was so mild in his advances was that he felt he must devote himself to his country. He considered this dallying at Lotus Fragrance's house as a theft of time from his country and his duty. He spent a great deal of his time reading books and pamphlets written by the leading progressive reformers, and he was a regular reader of the first and only newspaper in China, *The International Public News*, published in Shanghai by an American, John Allen Young, whose Chinese name was Lin Lao-Chih. These papers came to Nanchang by junks sailing up the Yangtze and then up the river Kan. They took ages to come. Steamboats were rarely seen and only used by foreigners in the Yangtze river. Most of the conservative people thought that to travel in such fantastic contrivances must be highly dangerous.

As Li Kang had written letters of a rebellious nature which were published in *The International Public News*, he had made many new friends and not a few enemies. A missionary from England, Timothy Richard, who took the Chinese surname "Li" and signed his name in Chinese as Li Ti-Mo-Tai, continued to send him letters from the province of Shansi. Timothy Richard had written many pamphlets on the science and history of the outer world in Chinese and the young Ta Tung admired his works very much. Both John Allen Young and Timothy Richard genuinely loved China, and they were very anxious to make China into a modern and powerful nation by persuading her to relinquish her obsolete ways and adopt a General Reform, as Japan had done not long before. But from the Empress Dowager downwards, ninety-nine per cent of the government officials stubbornly declined to hear of a change at all—let alone of so drastic a change as a General Reform.

While Li Kang counted his friends mainly among those obscure scholars, foreign missionaries, and young students

returned from Japan, who were scattered all over the vast country, his enemies were, alas! influential officials of the local government who were watching him threateningly at close quarters. In the nineteenth year of Kwang Hsu (1893), Ta Tung, then a boy of thirteen, when calling for some letters at an agency, was taken to the district Magistrate's Yamen. The boy was brave and calm, and he demanded the reason for his arrest. The Magistrate gave him a bunch of letters, all addressed to Li Kang and all opened, and said that one of them came from a very dangerous foreigner named Li Ti-Mo-Tai. Though nothing to justify a charge of high treason was found among the contents of these letters, Li Kang was soundly admonished for having been so indiscreet as to correspond with such men. As the Magistrate considered himself the father of the people in his county, he would like to point out to his children that that notorious foreigner, Li Ti-Mo-Tai, had been recently deported from the Province of Shansi, and that it would therefore be very unwise of Li Kang to communicate with a disgraced "barbarous devil".

After the Magistrate had pronounced these words, he dismissed the boy. Ta Tung was led away to the porter's office and the servants of the Yamen all congratulated him on his extremely good luck in having escaped being beaten and sentenced. Ta Tung was surprised and said innocently:

"Thank you, but I don't see that I have committed any offence."

As Ta Tung seemed to show no appreciation of his good fortune in having been spared, and moreover gave no indication that he was going to tip them, the servants began to resort to sarcasm, and one of them said:

"We don't need an offence from you to imprison you, my boy!"

Ta Tung had heard scandalous things about district Yamens and the servants there, and he decided to leave the place without further ado. As he turned to go away, one of them held him back and asked

"Hey, my boy, where are you going?"

"Home, of course."

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

"What is it?"

"Think a little, my boy! What have you to do before leaving us?"

"I don't know. What have I to do?"

"Feel in your pocket, then! Haven't you got something for us?"

Ta Tung could hardly believe that these people could possibly ask him for money. He was a generous boy and would perhaps have given them something if they had not approached him threateningly. Now he was determined to give them nothing.

"I don't see any reason at all why I should tip you!"

The servants were angry and roughly pushed him out of the office. While Ta Tung was still lost in astonishment at their rude behaviour, two servants came out after him and dragged him away. Ta Tung called out

"Stop it! I know my way out . . ."

"No, you don't know the way out! We'll show you a short cut!" said one

"We'll show you a short cut to take you out of this world, my boy!" rejoined the other

In spite of the boy's strong protests, they took him to a dirty bare room and locked him up. The boy shouted, but nothing happened. He kicked and knocked on the doors and wall and shouted again at the top of his voice until he was tired and hoarse, but nobody came. 'Are they really going to let me die here?' thought the boy. But he was mistaken, for later on he heard somebody

approaching the place. The boy shouted again. The footsteps stopped and a gruff voice said:

"If you make any more disturbance, I'll never come to you, you stupid boy!"

The boy had to be submissive, and an elderly man came to speak to him through the locked doors.

"You can shout your head off. Nobody will take any notice of you. I came here to help you. And you wanted to keep me off!"

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were coming to help me!"

"Never mind! Now, tell me, do you want to send a letter to your family—to your father, I suppose . . .?"

"No, not my father, but I want to send a letter to my uncle . . ."

"Well, I could do that for you if you will be very quiet about it . . ."

"Oh, thank you! How kind of you!" Ta Tung was surprised to find there were such good persons in a Yamen.

"If you can't write, I could write it for you and that would only cost you five hundred pieces of cash extra."

"No, thank you, I can write myself," said the boy.

"All right, then write it yourself. Now, give me five hundred pieces of cash and I'll give you paper and brush pen!"

"But why should I pay you when I am writing it myself?"

"Well, this is for the paper, envelope and the use of brush pen and ink, and also part of the delivery fee. Of course your—your uncle, is he?—your uncle will pay something for it as well."

"I'll pay you nothing. This is plain blackmail!"

"Don't use foul language, you insolent boy! If you don't want to communicate with your folks, it is not my concern. Perhaps you prefer to stay here. But this is not

a hotel, and you will find we charge expensive terms for your meals and bed-clothes!"

"But if a prisoner cannot afford to pay . . .?"

"Oh, no! This is not a prison and you are not officially a prisoner! You are being kept here pending some settlement of a private account, that's all." He walked away haughtily

'Good Heavens! This is the Yamen of the father of the people!' thought Ta Tung. He didn't want to send a letter, not because it was so expensive, but he decided that he must refuse to have anything to do with them, as a protest. When night approached and he was hungry and cold, the elderly man walked past his room several times, but the boy was obstinate and preferred to go without food and lodging rather than speak with him.

In the meantime, the Letter Agency sent a messenger to the country telling Li Kang of Ta Tung's arrest by the order of the Magistrate. Both the great-aunt and Li Kang's wife were alarmed at the bad news, and Li Kang hurried to the district Yamen. He arrived there in the early morning, but was kept waiting until late in the night before he was at last given an audience. During his long wait in the porter's office, he asked the whereabouts of Ta Tung, and they merely told him to ask the Magistrate.

Before Li Kang had time to say a word, the Magistrate told him briefly what he had said to Ta Tung and got up to dismiss him. Li Kang interrupted

"Where is my humble nephew, Ta Tung? Why have you detained him, my lord?"

"I have not detained him, you are misinformed!" He turned away to retire

"One moment, my lord! He was arrested by your men and has not been released yet."

"If he is in the Yamen, you can take him home I assure

you I don't know anything about it!" And he went off without looking at Li Kang.

It was now clear to Li Kang that Ta Tung had been unofficially held up by the servants and he therefore went to the porter's office to demand the boy's immediate release. The Chief Porter, who had avoided speaking with him before, now asked him to sit down and talked to him at great length, explaining the vast expenditure of the porter's office and telling him that his only source of income lay in tips from visitors. At first Li Kang was so angry that he said he would not consent to be blackmailed into paying a sort of ransom for his nephew. He demanded to see the Magistrate again. The porter said the Magistrate had now gone to bed and that orders had been given that nobody was to be admitted.

Li Kang knew that the Magistrate would certainly approve the doings of his servants, so the only thing he could do would be to send in a petition to the Prefect at the Prefecture Yamen. As it was not worth while to make a big row over a small sum of money—though the demand was quite an outrage—he decided at last to forbear this scandalous corruption of the Yamen by giving the porter a tip—quite a big one—to get the poor boy out as quickly as possible.

The boy was overjoyed to see his uncle, and told him about the outrageous behaviour of his jailers. Li Kang smiled philosophically and said that they need not go into it just now.

After this experience, Ta Tung was more than ever interested in the discussion of the General Reform. In the summer of the following year Japan, after occupying Korea, which belonged to China, began to attack the north-east part of the mainland. Later on, war was declared and the Chinese army and navy—if a fleet of

such poorly equipped junks could be called a navy—suffered one defeat after another. The following spring brought forth their complete surrender and the death of the Admiral-in-Chief of the Chinese Navy. The eleven articles of the peace treaty were signed by Li Hung-Chang amidst loud cries of injustice by every man and woman throughout the whole world. Later on Russia, France and Germany intervened. They said that they wanted to help China. They were really trying to maintain a balance of power in Asia.

That the Government was in the wrong hands was now beyond doubt. Since the Opium War everybody knew that a sound navy was essential to national defence. Huge sums of money had been raised to establish a navy, and now the people had witnessed the annihilation of the whole thing in the twinkling of an eye. Something must have been wrong with it. The Government never issued a budget and never told the people what happened to the money specially collected for certain purposes. The building of the New Summer Palace of Yi-Ho-Yuan, a pleasure garden for the Empress Dowager completed only a few years before, provoked much criticism, for it became an open secret that the money used for the palace came from the fund for the navy.

While discontent was everywhere rife in the country, a young man in the province of Kwangtung, a doctor by profession, organised a society called Shin Chung Hui, or the Association for the Rebirth of China. The name was self-explanatory and its aim was to overthrow the Empress Dowager and the Manchus and establish a democracy. This young man's name was Sun Wen, and he was later known as Sun Yat-Sen. Li Kang had been corresponding with him for some time, but now that a secret society had been formed, letters ceased to be passed through the ordinary channel of the Letter

Agencies. Dr. Sun's plot to take the city of Canton failed when a shipment of arms was discovered by the Police Dr. Sun escaped to Japan, but many of his comrades were arrested.

When the Government issued a universal warrant for the arrest of Sun Wen and ordered that everybody who had had anything to do with this rebel was to be arrested, the district Magistrate remembered seeing this man's letters to Li Kang. One day just before dawn, voices and hoofs were heard in the Village of the Li Families, and immediately there were heavy knocks at the door of Li Kang's house. The ladies were greatly frightened But Li Kang was calm and told Ta Tung to open the door. Soldiers and policemen, with torches in hand, rushed in.

They asked for Li Kang who boldly came forward and was immediately arrested and bound. A careful search was ordered and the house was almost torn down. Many precious books nicely printed and tastefully bound with silk thread were thrown all over the floor. The soldiers and policemen just trampled on them as if they were rubbish. Finally they took every letter they could find in the building. When they led Li Kang away, the great-aunt retired to her room Li Kang's wife wept and wanted to follow him. Ta Tung, though only fifteen, had actually reached years of discretion He told her not to give way to grief but to stay at home while he himself would go to the city and look after his uncle. The great-aunt came out with a small bag of money which she handed to Ta Tung.

"This is all my savings intended for a decent coffin for my old bones You had better take it and use it in the Yamen The sharks there must be fed, and here is my contribution together with my curse on them. I'm strong. I'll be able to curse them for some years "

Li Kang's wife said that this timely loan would be re-

paid even if they had to sell all their ricefield. She also gave Ta Tung all the ready cash she had in hand and told him that she would raise more to meet the expenses that would now be fast mounting up.

Li Kang was imprisoned in the district Yamen. Ta Tung was not admitted. It was with difficulty that he found out the charge was one of high treason. He went to see friends and relatives for help, but hearing of the charge, they were as afraid of him as of poison. It was mostly the poorest of the country people who came to comfort Li Kang's wife and offer whatever help they could give.

The Magistrate tried Li Kang immediately.

The court had a very formidable atmosphere on such an occasion when nobody except the officials of the Yamen were allowed to attend. The Magistrate knew perfectly well who Li Kang was, but he went through the routine procedure, first asking the prisoner's name, age, native place, profession and so on. Then he asked the police chief to give him the papers collected at the house search. Although unable to discover anything that would constitute the slightest case of law breaking, let alone high treason, he nevertheless banged a piece of wood—which is called “the terror of the court”—heavily on his desk and said in a stern voice.

“Prisoner, better confess your guilt.”

“I've no guilt to confess, my lord,” said Li Kang, who was made to kneel in the middle of the court towards the Magistrate's desk.

“It's no use your denying it, prisoner! Tell me where your accomplice, Sun Wen, has gone, and you will benefit by your confession.”

“I'm not his accomplice, my lord.”

The Magistrate banged the piece of wood incessantly and the attendant accordingly gave a loud shout to

frighten the prisoner. The Magistrate exclaimed

“Do you dare to deny that you know him?”

“No, my lord. But we never met each other!”

“Ah, that’s better! You wrote to each other with the object of fomenting revolution!”

“No, my lord. We merely discussed the difference between the Chinese and the European systems of medicine.”

“Rubbish!”

“Yes, my lord! He is a doctor of the European school, and I studied and understand a little about Chinese medicine.”

The piece of wood was banged again and loud shouts were repeated. The Magistrate threw to the ground two bamboo sticks from a holder on his table and said:

“No use to be lenient with an obstinate prisoner. You want some torture! Give him two hundred strokes!”

“Yes, my lord!” shouted the attendants.

They started to beat him on the back with a long bamboo stick. One of the attendants counted the strokes in a loud voice. Li Kang clenched his teeth and said nothing. At fifty strokes, the Magistrate banged his piece of wood again and said

“The prisoner is not yelling. The beating must have been very light. Strike heavily!”

“Yes, my lord!” shouted the attendants.

They struck heavily, but Li Kang maintained silence

The Magistrate intervened again after a hundred had been given. He asked the prisoner if he would change his mind and confess. Li Kang, being sixty-three years of age, could not bear the pain and had already fainted. The Magistrate ordered the beating to cease and the prisoner to be returned to jail. The court was dismissed and the clerk gave the records to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate was rather worried about Li Kang’s

case It was obvious that torture was wasted on such a stubborn prisoner, whose old age and weak condition were two important things which he must take into consideration. He did not want to have Li Kang die while in his custody, so he decided, by altering the records, to make the case a very serious one, and next day he passed the whole affair on to his superior's Yamen. Unfortunately the Prefect of the Prefecture was now a Manchu, whose title and office had been acquired by the payment of a big contribution to the Imperial Court, and he knew nothing about government or law. Li Kang was tried and tortured once more, and as he could neither speak nor move, the Prefect, fearing the elderly prisoner would die while still in his hands, decided to add a few more serious accusations to stress the importance of the case, and hurriedly passed the matter to the Provincial Judge's Yamen.

The Provincial Judge, His Honour Mr. Wei, was the literary man who had a great regard for the arts. He took much more interest in poetry, painting and calligraphy than in legal proceedings. Generally he left all his documents in the hands of his secretaries, who, in turn, trusted them to the clerks. A few years ago he had been but a Prefect. But because of the help of his literary associates, who were once only possible candidates for the highest state examination and later had successfully passed with honours, he had been recently promoted to the office of Provincial Judge.

The case being one of High Treason, he had to glance over the various dispatches about it, and by chance he remembered that Li Kang, the prisoner in question, was the haughty calligraphist whom he once wished to meet but who had utterly rebuffed his friendship. An incident of such rare rudeness could never be forgotten nor forgiven, and he was determined to deal with this important

case sternly. For once in his life he examined all the papers with great care, and to his astonishment he found that there was no evidence whatever against the accused except that the prisoner did not deny that he had communicated with the rebel Sun Wen on questions of medicine. But even that confession was not signed, owing to the fact that the prisoner had fainted during his first trial. As for all the further accusations to the effect that he had plotted with various other rebels, they were entirely groundless. The Judge's sense of justice made him feel sympathetic towards Li Kang, who after all was, in his opinion, a good calligraphist. After obtaining the accused's signature to his statement of the first trial, the Judge promised to release him on bail, pending further examination if necessary.

It was with great difficulty that Ta Tung succeeded in persuading two respectable shops to furnish a guarantee that Li Kang would not escape but would report himself at the court whenever he was called upon to do so, as required by the authorities in order to effect the release. When Li Kang was at last set free, he was carried home on a bamboo couch, and seemed to be more dead than alive. Both his wife and the great-aunt wanted to get a doctor to examine him, but Li Kang firmly said 'no'.

"You mustn't refuse to have a doctor because of the expense," his wife urged. "As long as the mighty mountain exists there will be no shortage of firewood . . ."

"But I'm not a productive mountain. You'll have to get firewood from other sources," Li Kang exclaimed. "Besides, I know I am all right. If you'll bring me pen and paper, I'll prescribe for myself."

"The best of physicians does not consult himself," wife insisted.

"That is good and sound advice in ordinary cases

as I'm only suffering from wounds and under-nourishment while in prison, there is actually no need for medical advice." He smiled. "You should remember that not taking any medicine is better than having an average doctor!"

His wife was very much reassured to hear his usual high-spirited way of arguing. She said jokingly

"Then you must think very highly of yourself as a doctor. For you've just suggested that you would prescribe for yourself."

"Most of our medicines are merely harmless herbs, the most important function of which is to give the patient psychological reassurance. When a malady comes, all the doctor can do is to let it run its course. He has to prescribe something, because if he doesn't he will not be paid. In most cases the more medicines you give to the patient, the better he thinks you are, and because of that often enough the quicker he recovers."

"And you also think that you can give yourself that kind of reassurance . . ."

"No, if I'm going to take any medicine at all, it will be entirely for your benefit. I'll prescribe something which tastes nice, and you'll be relieved when you imagine it is doing me good!"

The medical myth being solved, they dropped the subject. And in a few days Li Kang was well enough to discuss social and political and religious problems with Ta Tung again. After such an awful experience, Ta Tung's feelings towards the officials became more bitter than before. When he learned that the allegations of Li Kang's crimes had been increased each time the case was passed to a higher Yamen, and that in doing so they had not even tried to provide any evidence, he was staggered.

"But how could they dare to do this without any proof against you? I thought they had established evidence!"

"No, my boy! I was prepared for this! Whatever they might do to me, they could never find any proof against me!"

"But then, how unjust this is!" exclaimed Ta Tung "Suppose you were really innocent—suppose you knew nothing about Dr. Sun's political activities and had corresponded with him honestly and truly discussing questions of medicine . . ."

"It doesn't make any difference That is why we must have a General Reform, my boy. At present we have no Constitution. Whatever the Government do to us, we have no right to say anything against it. The law governs the governed, but not the governing We live entirely on their generosity and mercy—if they have any!"

"Is a Constitution sufficient to rebuild our nation? The whole country is in the hands of crooks. I don't believe there is a single government official who isn't one hundred per cent corrupt!"

"I don't know, my Ta Tung. The Provincial Judge seemed to be a decent fellow, for one. I ought not to have snored when he came to see me. But he was such a bad calligraphist If I hadn't pretended that I was asleep, I might have had to say something about his handwriting, and I couldn't have helped giving him my honest opinion That would have made him my enemy for life!"

"It is true that he released you. But you don't know that his Yamen is not filled with vampires. We need a sweeping change badly. All the officials ought to be beheaded and all the jailers put in prison."

"Dr Sun is somewhat of your opinion. He thinks that as long as the Manchus are in power there is no chance for China. But there are many others who disagree with him. Kang Yu-Wei only wants a General Reform He considers that the young Emperor Kwang Hsu is very promising. If the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi and her

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"It doesn't make any difference. That is why we must have a General Reform, my boy. At present we have no Constitution. Whatever the Government do to us, we have no right to say anything against it. The law governs the governed, but not the governing. We live entirely on their generosity and mercy—if they have any!"

"Is a Constitution sufficient to rebuild our nation? The whole country is in the hands of crooks. I don't believe there is a single government official who isn't one hundred per cent corrupt!"

"I don't know, my Ta Tung. The Provincial Judge seemed to be a decent fellow, for one. I ought not to have snored when he came to see me. But he was such a bad calligraphist. If I hadn't pretended that I was asleep, I might have had to say something about his handwriting, and I couldn't have helped giving him my honest opinion. That would have made him my enemy for life!"

"It is true that he released you. But you don't know that his Yamen is not filled with vampires. We need a sweeping change badly. All the officials ought to be beheaded and all the jailers put in prison."

"Dr. Sun is somewhat of your opinion. He thinks that as long as the Manchus are in power there is no chance for China. But there are many others who disagree with him. Kang Yu-Wei only wants a General Reform. He considers that the young Emperor Kwang Hsu is very promising. If the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi and her

henchmen and followers could be wiped away, China would become powerful again. Our friend from England, Li Ti-Mo-Tai, agrees with him. I must write to him as soon as I am better."

"That is dangerous now. I believe they are observing all your correspondence"

"Never mind, for I am merely asking him to look after you for me."

"Look after me?"

"Yes, I'm to leave you soon, my Ta Tung."

Ta Tung was dumbfounded Li Kang smiled.

"Don't worry, my boy. I'm not going to prison this time, but to a very rich family who have been for years wanting to engage me as their private secretary. Because I hate such a post, and also because I had to teach you, I refused. Now that you are grown up and have learned practically everything I know, I have decided to accept it. Besides, we shall be in need of the money now. My recent tour through the prisons of all the three Yamen must have cost a great deal of money . . ."

"No, you need not worry about money."

"I know they are expensive places. You must have spent quite a lot on me!"

"No!"

"It is useless to deny it. I knew from the expressions on the jailers' faces. When they looked disdainfully at me, it said very plainly that you had not managed to get any money for them yet. When they forgot about me, that meant a little money. And when they smiled at me, I gathered that a part of my ricefields were gone!"

"There are still some left over."

"That was indeed very generous of them!"

"I am old enough to work now"

"You have far more important work ahead than to earn a living" Changing the subject abruptly, he asked "Well,

Ta Tung, tell me frankly, what is your opinion on Christianity?"

"I hate it! You are not thinking that my work in future lies there?"

"No! But be sure you do not misunderstand me. I'm asking for your opinion on Christianity—not on the Christians, especially those in our village. Of course you hate the few Christians you have seen around here. They are all regular sinners, as they are called by the new term of their religion. And if they were not sinners, what use would they have for the foreign religion? The Buddhist or Taoist priest cannot protect them when they have broken the law. But if a missionary claims the prisoner to be one of his converts, he has to be set free at once. Apart from a few unscrupulous missionaries, and of course those professional Christian sinners, Christianity is a religion one shouldn't hate. It teaches you to be good just as any of our religions do."

"I'm afraid I hate it intensely."

"Why?"

"Because it is so aggressive. Any of our religions, especially Confucianism, if that is considered a religion instead of a philosophy, would never preach in a way even to indicate mildly that all the other religions are heathen and heretic, and that only the doctrine it preaches is the way to Heaven. It is the most ungracious thing that one can possibly preach!"

"What you have heard in the streets and spoken by passers-by, you should not remember. Have you forgotten Confucius's teachings? I ought to have a few books about Christianity in my library so that you will know better, but it means so little to me that I never cared to keep them when I received them from my missionary friends."

"You seem to approve of it, and I thought that you

didn't! I often wondered why it was possible that you had so many friends who are missionaries and yet you don't quarrel."

"I stand aloof from religions because I am indifferent to all of them. I follow my sense of right and wrong, and that is my religion. Perhaps I have accepted all their good teachings and disregarded all their selfish rules. But I am extremely fortunate in having met with only those missionaries who are sensible. When they have tried to convert me, and failed, they have never bothered me again. If they pester me, I drop them. So here I am, still a confirmed old heathen."

"Why did you suddenly ask me about Christianity?"

"Because I am wondering whether you will consent to study in a missionary school."

"Of course I will if I have the chance."

"I know you will. And I know that there is a strong possibility that you'll become a Christian one day."

"No! Never!"

"Yes, you may become one if you hate it now."

"You think that I am inconsistent?"

"No. If we love a woman, we may hate her one day, and *vice versa*. With religion or anything else, it is also like that. Only if you don't bother about it, you won't be moved by it."

"I want to study in a missionary school because I need the new knowledge which I cannot obtain elsewhere. But all the same I loathe Christianity."

"Never mind, my boy, Christianity is above caring whether you loathe it or not. It is also great enough not to suffer at all from the harm done to it by the aggressive policy of some of the missionaries in this country. My prospective employer is also an aggressive Christian. He prayed for my conversion every time I was invited to have a meal with him. That is why I have been avoiding

him and refused his offer. Now I have to take him as he is, and I suppose such prayers will do me a great deal of good. They will improve my patience."

Ta Tung was pensive. He thought earnestly of giving up studying and joining Ta Yu in the fields. But he realised that the property left was very little, and Ta Yu would not need any help. Of course, he could rent some ricefields, and by working in them very hard, he would perhaps be able to contribute something towards the daily expenses of the family. He and Ta Yu could keep a family of five alive without difficulty, but their way of life would have to be different. He and Ta Yu would not mind, but it would be hard on Li Kang, his wife and the great-aunt. Then there was the collecting of second-hand books. It was a very cheap hobby for the old man, but for people who lived from hand to mouth it became a luxury which must be cut out altogether. So, however desperately Ta Tung wanted to keep his uncle from accepting a job with an objectionable man, he decided to abide by what Li Kang had proposed. Perhaps the old man would be unhappier at home if deprived entirely of what he had been used to, than living with a tactless Christian who would give him most of the comforts of life, which were very important to people of Li Kang's age.

Ta Tung was thirsty for "new" knowledge. For that he would willingly sacrifice anything and everything. To study in a missionary school could not be much worse than to go through hell, and he was quite prepared to pass through a hundred hells if he could only acquire some "new" knowledge. In Li Kang's extensive library there was only one slim volume which could be called a book of "new" knowledge. It was entitled *The Eight Lines*, and he had spent many sleepless nights over it. As no other book had ever puzzled him so much, he thought this elementary treatise on trigonometry the highest

knowledge in science. Not until he had read some pamphlets on geometry and algebra did he begin to understand this book a very little. He saw immediately that unless he acquired an efficient instrument—a European language—his hope of understanding thoroughly algebra, geometry or trigonometry was very remote. He could find no such books in Chinese.

Towards the end of the year Li Kang was entirely recovered from his wounds, and arrangements were also completed for him to take up the post in Kan-Chow, a Prefecture city in the south of the Province, where his employer, Mr. Lo, lived. The salary was sixty taels of silver a year, and work was to begin on the sixteenth of the first moon of the new year. It was about eight hundred li from Nanchang, and the voyage up the Kan river might take anything up to a month or two if the wind was not favourable. Of course, to travel by road would be quicker, but Li Kang could not afford to hire a sedan chair, and Ta Tung would not consent to let him make the journey on foot. So, in the middle of the eleventh moon, on a fine day with a strong north wind, Li Kang bade farewell to the great-aunt, his wife and son. His luggage was carried by the boatman, who had sailed his boat to The Bridge of Heaven to receive his patron Ta Tung, carrying a small bamboo bookcase for his uncle, went to the boat to see him off.

The boatman's son took the luggage from his father and unpacked it in the cabin. The boatman's wife made a comfortable bed for Li Kang, and she also made and served tea. Li Kang wanted the boatman's family to join him in taking some refreshments which he had brought with him, they thanked him but declined the honour. While Ta Tung was glad to see that his uncle was travelling with a very amiable family, they too were glad to have such a kind gentleman as their customer.

Before setting sail for the main river and thence southwards, Li Kang said to Ta Tung.

"My boy, I'm very sad to leave you, but circumstances have left me no choice. Be of good cheer and don't worry about me at all. Li Ti-Mo-Tai's answer should come very soon, but I cannot wait for it. He had urged me several times to send you to the missionary school in the city, and said that he would see that they admitted you without charging a tuition fee. Even if that fails to materialise, you must enter the school next term. My salary is coming, and we can now afford to pay the tuition fee, if necessary."

"I won't think of burdening you with my expenses . . ."

"I shall grieve the more if your education is hampered because you won't spend my money for it! Do as I tell you, and I need not instruct you to study hard. That I know you will do. Take care of yourself, and farewell!"

"Take care of yourself, uncle, and may you have a fair wind all the way."

"And may you have a fair wind all your life."

Coming out of the boat and standing on the little wooden bridge, Ta Tung watched there until the sails of the junk had completely disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VI

*"As a piece of rough jade
Has to be cut, ground, carved and polished,
So a man has to be taught and trained
Before he is restrained, courteous, learned and refined"*

LI TI-MO-TAI'S letter arrived soon after Li Kang was gone. In accordance with the orders left by Li Kang, Ta Tung opened and read it. The faithful English friend said

he was most sorry to hear of his elder brother Kang's recent misfortune and hoped by the Grace of God, everything would turn out all right in the end. He professed that, since his surname was also 'Li', they were as good as one family, and he had always regarded Ta Tung as his nephew. Of course he would see that Ta Tung should receive a thoroughly good education, and it was his responsibility to send his nephew to the missionary school in Nanchang. He enclosed a letter to the principal of that school, and asked Ta Tung to go and see that gentleman, who would certainly welcome him. He added that he hoped Ta Tung would enjoy working under this English gentleman, and that, no matter what happened, he would always be delighted to help his nephew. Praying God to bless Li Kang and the whole family, he concluded the letter and signed himself as "the stupid younger brother, Li Ti-Mo-Tai."

Ta Tung was overjoyed. The enclosed letter fascinated him. It was the first time he had ever seen a foreign envelope, which was made of a strong and stiff paper and light blue in colour—all so utterly different from a Chinese one. As it was unsealed, he opened it to have a peep at the letter itself. The notepaper was also strong and stiff, and the writing, crawling along like rows of wriggling earthworms, seemed particularly fascinating. Of course he did not know which side to hold uppermost, because he could not find a single letter which was similar to those he saw in his algebra book. He felt that he would willingly give a few years of his life in exchange for being able to read it.

Ta Tung examined the envelope again. There the recipient's name was written in two languages. What the original one was he could not tell, but the Chinese version was "Mr. Ma-Ke-Lao".

Very early in the morning of the following day Ta

Tung took his letter to the missionary school, which stood by the river just outside the North Gate of the city of Nanchang. He was greatly impressed by the school building, which was lofty and magnificent and quite different from any Chinese house he had seen. As he was standing there, staring and wondering at the building, a well-dressed and proud man came forward and addressed him in a stern voice.

"Hey, what are you doing here? Be off at once! You'll get into trouble if the foreign gentleman sees you!"

Guessing the man to be the school porter, Ta Tung said with a smile:

"That is exactly what I came for. I want to see the foreign gentleman, Mr Ma-Ke-Lao, the principal."

That such an ill-clad country boy should ask to see the principal was a great surprise even to the very self-possessed porter.

"The foreign gentleman has no time to see everybody. Who told you to come?"

"Here is a letter from Mr. Li, who told me that . . ."

"Oh! So you are delivering a letter from Mr. Li. Why didn't you say so before? You may leave it here and go away."

"But Mr. Li wanted me to present the letter to Mr. Ma in person."

Ta Tung showed the unsealed letter to the porter.

"Who is this Mr. Li?"

"He is also a foreign gentleman . . ."

"Oh!" the porter's expression was somewhat changed. "Why didn't you say so before? If such is the order of your foreign gentleman, you must wait here. The classes are going on. Our principal is very busy. Nobody may disturb him."

"When do you think he will be free?"

"I don't know. You just wait."

From early morning till midday Ta Tung waited, and when he saw people going out for their lunch, he mentioned once more to the porter about his wish to see the principal. The porter said that everybody was going to have lunch and that to interrupt the foreign gentleman's meal would be an unpardonable crime. Soon a man from the kitchen came in with a tray on which was the porter's lunch. He ate it without saying anything to Ta Tung.

From midday till late in the afternoon Ta Tung continued to wait. Winter days are short, but this day seemed to have lasted a year. When Ta Tung saw the sun begin to sink in the west, he told the porter that he had twenty li to go on foot to get home, and demanded to see the principal at once.

"But this is the foreign gentleman's tea time. I can't go in just now," the porter remarked casually. "If you will be quiet for a little longer, I'll see what I can do for you."

"You have made me wait here the whole day. Perhaps he'll be having his supper next . . ."

"No!" corrected the porter. "The foreign gentleman takes his 'dinner' at home with his foreign lady."

"I don't mind what he takes or where and with whom he takes it!" Ta Tung raised his voice. "I must see him!"

"Don't shout. I can hear you. If your stomach is empty, you may go and have something to eat at any of the restaurants near-by."

"If you don't take me in to see the principal, I'll go in myself and have some tea with him." Ta Tung started to go. He was in earnest.

The porter was annoyed, but also frightened.

"Hey! Stop! I am going in this minute. You wait under the verandah while I go and see whether the foreign gentleman has finished his tea."

He followed Ta Tung out of the lodge and then locked

his door. Before going leisurely across the lawn towards the main school building, he asked Ta Tung:

“What is the name . . . ?”

“My name is Li Ta Tung . . . ”

“No, I don’t want your name! What is the name of the foreign gentleman who wants you to present the letter?”

“His name is Mr. Li Ti-Mo-Tai.”

“You won’t give me the letter?”

“No! I’ll present it myself”

Giving Ta Tung a last look of annoyance, he walked on to the grass, which was kept beautifully green even in such cold winter days. On reaching the central door of the main building, he stopped and peeped inside timidly. His haughtiness, which had been so impressive a moment ago, had by now completely gone. At last he adjusted the collar of his cotton-padded coat, wiped his face with his hand, and went into the building with a very pleasant smile on his lips. After some time he reappeared through the door and signalled to Ta Tung to approach. Ta Tung hurriedly walked straight across the lawn, and saw the man waving his arms frantically. Not knowing what he meant, Ta Tung walked on, and on arriving at the door was rebuffed by the porter.

“Open your eyes wider when walking, my boy,” the porter whispered with suppressed anger. “Why did you tread on the grass? And why did you ignore me when I signalled you to keep off?”

“But I was only following your footsteps . . . ”

“Speak softly! The lawn is reserved for the foreign gentleman and his wife. Nobody else besides them is allowed to walk on the grass. It is my responsibility to keep it in good order. I have to see to the weeding and watering of it. Of course I may walk on it once in a while.”

"I didn't know. I'm sorry."

"Mind your manners, my boy, especially before the foreign gentleman. Be very respectful to him. When he is speaking to you, stand at attention and have your head bowed slightly. To whatever he asks you, say 'Yes, sir'. As I am bringing you to him I am responsible for your behaviour. Remember what I have just told you."

Ta Tung was silent.

The porter led Ta Tung into the building and went through a long hall to a door at the end. It was tightly closed, and the porter knocked at it timidly. A strange voice within said "Come in." The porter opened the door softly and ushered Ta Tung into a big, bright, lofty and warm room.

At a big desk near the window a queer-looking middle-aged man with ash-brown hair, a very pale face and dressed in an odd manner with a stiff white band all round his neck, was sitting. The desk was full of strange things, and he was writing when they entered. He ceased writing and looked up. Ta Tung bowed to him, and he returned the salute with a slight inclination of his head. Then he searched the boy from head to foot with his blue eyes

He said to the porter in a peculiar flat tone

"Leave him here. You may go."

"Yes, sir." The porter bowed and went away, closing the door behind him softly.

The foreigner continued to examine Ta Tung for some time and then said.

"Did you say that you had a letter for me from my colleague Dr. Li Ti-Mo-Tai?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you the letter with you?"

"Yes, sir."

Ta Tung immediately handed over the letter. Glancing over it quickly, the man said:

"Are you Li Ta Tung?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you are quite a rustic. How could my colleague call you a brilliant scholar? Can you read and write?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dr. Li says that your uncle is a very good friend of his. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dr. Li suggests that I should take you as a student in this school. Is that what you have come to see me for?"

"Yes, sir."

So far the porter's instruction had been very serviceable. It had put the awe-inspiring foreign gentleman into a much better mood than he would have been in otherwise. But the next question was different.

"You know the tuition fees of this school. I suppose your uncle is very rich and a big land-owner in the country, isn't he?"

Ta Tung hesitated for a second and decided that honesty was better than blind obedience.

"No, sir."

"What!" The foreigner's countenance instantly changed to a look of great displeasure. Ta Tung could not but admire the wisdom of the porter, who, he was glad to know, was no longer in the room "What do you mean? Who is going to pay your tuition fees for you?"

"Nobody, sir!"

"Did you say 'nobody'?"

"Yes, sir."

The man re-read the letter with an expression of astonishment Putting his hand on his brow, he exclaimed.

"I see! He must be wanting me to take you as a self-supporting student!"

Reading the letter a third time, he threw it down with clear disappointment.

"Well, my boy," he said, gathering all his Christian spirit to deal with an unpleasant business. "Since you cannot afford to pay fees, what can you do to support yourself?"

"Anything you want me to do, sir. I think I can . . ."

"Don't brag, my boy," he interrupted in a stern voice. "How could you do anything? Even I dare not make such a statement!"

"I was going to say, sir, I think I can learn it if you will kindly show me how to do it, sir," explained the boy.

"You can, can you? We'll see."

Ta Tung saw him slap incessantly on a thing resembling a small bright brass bowl which stood upside down on a stand in a corner of the desk, and which produced a series of sharp ding dong sounds

A man, running into the room, made repeated bows to the foreigner and said:

"Here I am, Mr Ma. Here I am, Mr Ma "

As Ta Tung was occupying the centre of the room in front of the desk, the newcomer pushed the boy aside so that he could face the foreigner in a prominent position. He was not looking at Ta Tung at all

"Take a seat, Mr. Wang," Mr Ma said and waved his hand in a rather casual manner.

Mr. Wang was very grateful for being allowed to sit down in the Principal's office and thanked Mr. Ma again and again before taking half a seat on a small chair at the side of the desk. The phrase "half a seat" is not quite adequate to describe the way Mr Wang was sitting. He was actually no more than assuming a sitting posture on the very edge of the chair. Ta Tung could not help thinking that if the chair were taken away from behind Mr Wang, he would never feel that anything was missing

and could still continue to balance himself in his marvellous feat of sitting upon the air.

As Mr. Ma was showing the letter and telling Mr. Wang about the matter, Ta Tung looked at this extremely polite gentleman. He was very young, perhaps not many years older than Ta Tung, but he wore glasses, and had a matured air which made him look much older. He was evidently a northerner, tall and dark, and his accent sounded somewhat like Mandarin, with a little foreign tinge—acquired, perhaps, through his intimate association with Europeans.

After a brief conversation, to which Mr. Wang's contribution was limited to two phrases, "Yes, sir" and "Thank you, sir", Mr. Ma told Ta Tung to go with Mr. Wang, who led the boy to his room. It was next to that of the principal and was tiny and narrow. Entering this room, Ta Tung felt something was wrong. It looked much more like a passage than a room. Any room, as Ta Tung understood it, would have four walls, but this had only two, and along them were piles and piles of books and documents, so that you could hardly see any walls except the upper parts of them. Ta Tung tried to find the other two walls, and failed. For, at the farther end there was a french window which led to the garden, and at the end where he came in was the door. At each side of the door and window there was hardly any space.

A small desk was in the middle of the room, and Mr. Wang, though he had a very slender figure, had to squeeze himself to pass the desk and get to the inner part of it to sit in his chair. There were two stools on this side of the desk, but they were not provided for people to sit on but for Mr. Wang to put his books, boxes and documents upon. Ta Tung was told to stand near the stools while Mr. Wang was searching among piles of papers for

a form. Finally he found a very big sheet of paper, which he placed on the desk and then started to ask Ta Tung a series of questions. He recorded all Ta Tung's answers on the paper. After the preliminary questions as to name, age, native place, parentage, etc., were over, there came the question of religion. He asked Ta Tung:

“Was your father a Christian?”

“I don’t know, sir.” Ta Tung thought for a second and added. “I hardly think he was, sir.”

“And your mother? Is she a Christian?”

“No, sir. I’m afraid . . .”

“All right!” Mr. Wang cut him short, “Is your uncle or any member of your family a Christian?”

“No, sir. My uncle dislikes people who try to convert him . . .”

“All right! Since none of your family is a Christian, why should you want to be one?”

“But, sir, I don’t want to be a Christian if I can possibly help it.”

Mr. Wang was staggered. He put down his pen and exclaimed:

“What are you talking about? You don’t want to be a Christian?”

“What is the use, sir, if I don’t want to break the law and then ask the missionary to claim me and take me out of prison?”

“Look here, you! I’m not trying to convert you . . . and I never approve of converting people by tempting them with promises of protection by the Church in legal cases. But I thought you should know that Christians go to our Lord in Heaven, while heathens go to the Devil in Hell . . .”

“But, sir, that is purely superstition, used to fool the uneducated masses. A man like you, sir, must surely have enough common sense not to believe in such rubbish.”

"Rubbish? Common sense?" stormed Mr. Wang. "Do you realise of what intolerable blasphemy you are guilty? If it were not for Dr Li Ti-Mo-Tai's letter of recommendation and Mr. Ma's orders, I would throw you out of my office, neck and crop!"

Ta Tung began to realise that there were certain things which were much better left unsaid

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean it, sir."

"That is much better. Since Mr. Ma said that you could not afford to pay the tuition fees of this school, there is no alternative but for you to apply for a self-supporting studentship. This will necessitate you doing some kind of work for the school as part payment for our—er—er charity to you."

"Yes, sir."

"According to our regulations, Christians who are in difficult circumstances can apply, subject to the approval of the Principal and the Board of Directors of the school, for such studentships. As neither your father nor your mother, nor indeed anybody in your family, is a Christian, we cannot possibly accept you as a Christian without baptising you first. Now, answer me frankly: do you want to be baptised and become a Christian?"

Ta Tung thought for a second. There was no choice. He was prepared to consent to any condition.

"Yes, sir"

"Very good. There is but one thing more: you must find two guarantors—one to guarantee that you will serve our school or our mission for two years if you are to be a day student, and four years if you are to be a boarder, after you have graduated from here. During that time you will be paid, but the salary will be—well—comparatively small, so as to enable you to repay to some extent the free education supplied by us. He must also guarantee that, in case you are expelled from the school and are therefore

utterly unable to serve the school or mission, you will pay us in cash what you will owe us in regard to tuition and boarding fees. But if you are disabled from serving the school through serious illness or loss of limbs or death, then the school authorities will be generous and not insist upon your guarantor paying your fees. The second guarantor is a further safeguard for the school. He is to guarantee that the first guarantor will discharge his responsibilities."

Ta Tung was baffled by such complicated rules. He asked innocently.

"And do you require a third guarantor to guarantee the second so that . . .?"

"Don't be sarcastic! I have here two forms for you. Take them and go home. Come to see me as soon as you have got two Christians of high social standing to fill in these forms, sign and seal them . . ."

"But the Christians we know, except one or two missionaries, are all persons without any social standing. In fact, they are mostly dreadful scoundrels . . ."

"Stop it! If you don't know any reputable Christians, men of any religion will do, so long as they are officials no lower than the 5th Rank. In point of fact, we prefer heathens of position to disreputable Christians . . ."

"But, sir, we know nobody who is an official of the 5th Rank. My uncle hated all officials. He would not befriend any of them—not even officials of the 9th Rank!"

"Don't interrupt me! Failing officials of considerable standing, gentlemen of means worth not less than five thousand taels of silver will do."

"This sounds like getting a convict out of prison on bail. Why should I . . ."

"Be quiet! Our next term begins on the 28th of January next year. These guarantee forms must be handed in as soon as you can. If you are accepted, you must come one

week before the school opens to help the servants in getting the school ready. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go now. I am very busy. Here are the forms."

He waved his hand to dismiss Ta Tung, who received the forms, bowed, and made for the door. But the door, contrary to the Chinese custom, was tightly closed, and Ta Tung, taking hold of the knob and pulling and pushing, could not open it.

"Turn the knob, you clumsy idiot, turn the knob!" cried Mr. Wang impatiently.

Ta Tung turned the knob and was very happy to get out of the room.

'How on earth am I to get the two guarantors?' Ta Tung thought, and stared at the forms. He walked out of the school and, instead of going straight home, made his way to the city. He was one of the few who understood that the foreign calendar was quite different from that of the Chinese, and that by the 28th of January next year was meant the 14th day of the 12th moon of this year, which was hardly a month ahead, long before which date he had to get the forms filled up. It was now twilight and night was fast approaching. Thinking very hard, he walked on unsteadily in the middle of the street. Absent-mindedly he entered the North City Gate, which was called the Gate of Victory, and walked southwards along the Middle Main Street. By the time he reached the south end of this street, which was called "Washing Horse Pond", a great official, preceded by his usual retinue, was hurrying northwards in his sedan chair. This official was not a very ostentatious person, and as he was going back to his Yamen after one of his frequent visits to the Street of Books, his retinue was not very big and he did not use bugles and gongs to "open the road" for him as

other great officials usually did. He had only two forerunners and two attendants in front and two attendants behind his four-carrier sedan. It was dark and the street was not brightly lighted. Though the forerunners were shouting "make way" now and again to keep pedestrians from occupying the middle of the road, Ta Tung could neither see nor hear them and went straight into the little procession. He missed the forerunners and the attendants, but knocked face to face into the first carrier. He fell on the pavement, and so did the sedan chair with its load!

This was a very serious offence and the attendants immediately arrested Ta Tung. The great official luckily was not hurt, but only greatly frightened. After a moment of bustle and fuss, he collected himself and asked angrily what was the matter. Ta Tung was brought to him and he asked very sternly whether the boy knew what a great offence he had committed.

"No, sir," Ta Tung pleaded. "I was worrying . . ."

"You have caused His Excellency, the Provincial Judge, to fall from his chair . ." one of the attendants said fiercely.

"His Excellency Mr Wei?" Ta Tung asked.

"Yes, the Provincial Judge." The attendant replied.

"And the man of letters and the calligraphist?" Ta Tung remembered this official very clearly.

"And who are you? You seem to be a man of understanding. Are you a literary man?" Mr Wei was quite pleased to be called a man of letters and a calligraphist, even though by a man-in-the-street

"I hope to be, sir. I am Li Ta Tung, a student of histories and classics."

"What have you to say as to your offence?"

"Nothing, sir. I am sorry, sir. But curiously enough, such an offence is not without precedent in the history of literature. In the Tang Dynasty, the famous poet, Chia

Tao, committed an offence exactly like mine. He had just composed the couplet:

*'Birds alighted on the trees by the pond;
A monk pushed at the door in the moonlight.'*

He could not decide whether he might improve the second line by substituting the word 'knocked' for the word 'pushed'. Humming the line with these two words in turn and making the motions of knocking and pushing, he actually knocked and pushed the retinue of the official and great man of letters, Han Yu, who was gracious enough to help him by deciding for him that the word 'knocked', being of the 'male flat' tone, was better. I am also in a dilemma, though not about poetry. I am hoping to enter the missionary school as a self-supporting student, and the school authorities want me to provide two guarantors, who must be prominent men. I wonder whether Your Excellency could help me, as the great Tang Dynasty man of letters did the poet."

"A young man who is so well read about the Tang poets richly deserves help. Come to my Yamen some time, and I'll see what I can do for you." Mr. Wei smiled on hearing that he was compared with the great Han Yu.

"Your student is very grateful. But here are the forms, and if Your Excellency will be gracious enough to fill them and send them to the school, your student will be able to devote all his time to hearing your instruction when he comes to pay his respects to Your Excellency"

To this Mr. Wei consented, and Ta Tung handed the papers to one of the attendants. Bidding the Judge goodbye, Ta Tung hurried home to write to his uncle about the happenings of this eventful day

The Judge kept his word, and Ta Tung soon found that he was accepted by the missionary school. When it

was known that he was going to this missionary school, the whole village tried to dissuade him from going, on the ground that terrible rumours about foreigners were in circulation and that it was a very dangerous thing to associate with those "barbarian devils".

When all this advice failed, they tried to persuade Ta Tung that at least he should stay with his aunt until the New Year Festival was over. That being the only holiday rural people have, they thought that, even if the boy decided to go to his doom, it would be better to have a little enjoyment and happiness at home before going to the "devils". The fact that school started just before the New Year's holiday was enough proof of the ways of the "barbarians".

In spite of all these good counsels, Ta Tung maintained that it was his uncle's express wish that he should go to the school as soon as possible. He bade goodbye, early in the 12th moon, to his aunt, great-aunt and Ta Yu, and joined the school a week before it started its new term. Except for Mr. Wang and a few servants, headed by the porter, there was no one else in the school. Mr. Wang assigned Ta Tung to work under the supervision of the porter, who at once gave the boy some rough work to do in the garden. It was chiefly to keep the lawn in good order so that the foreign gentleman could walk on it with pleasure, and Ta Tung had to crawl all over it, working from morning till dusk for days. Very soon Ta Tung made friends with three younger servants who were at work in the library, laboratory and general classrooms getting things ready. He found out that they were, like himself, self-supporting students.

Teachers began to arrive three days before the school was due to open. By the day previous to the opening all the staff was complete, waiting for the return of the

Principal, who came late that evening. Mr. Ma had a young wife who ran a kind of private school for girls, which was near-by. They lived in a small building specially built for them just behind the school house. Ta Tung was baptised in the school chapel by Mr. Ma, who sprinkled a little water with his fingers on the boy's forehead and murmured something in a very solemn manner. It was a very simple ceremony, indeed so simple that Ta Tung could hardly believe that he had already been initiated into a new religion after the baptism was over. He was told that from henceforward his name was "Ta Wei" or in English, "David".

Quite a number of students came on the 28th of January, but classes were not conducted in earnest until two weeks later, when many more joined. In fact, for three weeks after the opening students were continuously coming to register, one or two a day, and the late-comers seemed to be more proud of their lateness than those who were less so. At first Ta Tung did not understand this, but later he learned that while the self-supporting students had to be at the school with the servants seven days before the term began, paying students who were Christians and claiming for a reduction of half fees, were obliged to present themselves on the opening day, and those non-Christians paying full fees, or those rich Christians who did not want to condescend to claim the reduction, might register as late as three weeks afterwards. For those who failed to arrive at their respective times were admitted just the same by paying an extra fine of half a tael of silver per day.

To the chapel all students had to go. The rich ones were allotted front row seats, while the half-fee students sat immediately behind them, and the four self-supporters took benches at the back after they had distributed the Bibles and hymn-books. These four boys had also to pass

around the specially made velvet bags with wooden handles for the collection during each gathering. The few girls from Mrs. Ma's private school shared the chapel with them, but they were strictly confined to the right side of the central gangway. At first there had been many strong protests from the parents of the girls on account of this barbarous custom of mixing girls with boys, but Mr. Ma succeeded in softening them by widening the centre gangway by two feet.

It would be unjust to say that Ta Tung was ill-treated in the school, for the boy enjoyed his life there very much and was, on the whole, quite happy. Although the Christian students who were paying half fees looked down on the self-supporters, and although these four had to play by themselves whenever they could find some spare time after their classes and other duties, they seemed content and never cared for the society of the haughty ones. In turn, the half-fee Christians were looked down upon by the rich full-fee boys who were the Select People of the whole community. The Select People would scarcely cast their disdainful eye on the lowest of the low—the self-supporters.

Apart from the difference in their social life in school, all the boys were given equal opportunities in their studies. In the classroom, as far as lessons were concerned, the Select People enjoyed no preferential treatment. Indeed, the rich full-fee students were rather poor scholars compared with the self-supporters, who proved to be brilliant ones. Ta Tung was especially studious and, except in the two subjects of the Bible and English, was the head of his class from the very start. He soon distinguished himself so much in Chinese, mathematics, history and geography that his teachers promoted him to the highest form in these four classes.

The duties in the garden, especially in the early spring,

kept Ta Tung so busy during the day time that he had scarcely any chance to study besides attending his classes. In the evening there was an hour and a half allowed to review the lessons of the day. By nine o'clock all students had to leave their studies for the bedrooms. By half-past nine all lights were extinguished. Ta Tung found he needed much more time for studying. At first he bought a packet of candles and lit one in his room to read after the school light was put out at the regular time. His room-mates, who were the other three self-supporters, said that it would not be allowed. But Ta Tung argued that since he was burning his own candle, and so long as he did not neglect his duty in the morning, he couldn't see why it should not be allowed.

Soon there came repeated knocks at his door. He heard Mr. Wang's voice saying:

"Put out the light at once. Who is it who dares to break the regulation of the school?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Wang, I thought . . ."

"Be silent, Li Ta Wei! Put out the light and report to me to-morrow morning."

On the following morning Mr. Wang accused Ta Tung of having endangered the lives of his fellow students and the properties of the school. For a first offence, Ta Tung was let off lightly by recording a "great discredit". If he should commit such a serious offence again, he would be expelled.

It was no use to argue with Mr. Wang. He would not accept the reasoning that candles were not more dangerous than the school oil lamps, and that Ta Tung's personal attention to the candle would give less chance of setting the place on fire than some of the students leaving the school lamps unattended in their rooms between nine o'clock and half-past, when they liked to visit other students' rooms. Besides, school regulations

must not be trifled with. While all the other students were under perfect discipline, it was outrageous to find a newcomer, and a self-supporter, too, daring to break school rules.

Ta Tung determined to read two or three hours more at night, and nothing could stop him from doing so. Since he was not allowed to read in his room, he waited for an hour, when he knew Mr Wang would be in bed fast asleep, and then went out, when it was fine and the moon was bright, into the playground with his book. If it was dark, he had to stand under the lamp outside the lavatory. It was a tiny oil lamp and flickered a great deal. Though it hurt his eyes a little, it was one of the few which was alight the whole night. As there were occasionally people coming out at night, Ta Tung had to hide his book hurriedly and retire to the lavatory at the sound of approaching footsteps. Within the closed door of a closet he could go on with his reading. It was stuffy and smelly, but it was his only sanctuary and last stronghold against intrusion, and also against the elements. For, when the weather was bad, he had to spend all the time within the closed doors of a closet.

It did not take very long for the school authorities to realise that they could utilise Ta Tung's services in some better way than by simply making him help the gardener.

Ever since the establishment of the school, the missionaries had found themselves confronted with the difficulty of getting good Chinese scholars to teach Chinese. Most self-respecting Chinese would have nothing to do with a school run by foreigners, and so the mission had to pick whoever could be found among the Christians, most of whom, unfortunately, were not very well educated in the Chinese classics. At present there was only one man who could teach the Chinese classics, and he had a very busy time in correcting compositions for both the boys and the

girls of the two schools. There were two more teachers for Chinese subjects, but they were far from proficient scholars and found it rather difficult to teach the children Chinese history and geography of which they themselves had little knowledge. Then there was Mr. Wang, who, in spite of being overburdened with the work of the school, had to teach several classes, which he found very difficult.

Soon it became evident that Ta Tung knew much more about history and geography than the teachers. Also, he could teach Chinese to the children of junior classes with competence. But Mr. Ma did not at all like the idea of allowing a rustic self-supporting student to take over the classes. He therefore only consented to let Ta Tung correct compositions and other papers so as to help the Chinese teacher. Ta Tung's new tutorial duties were easy and light, and they provided him with a little leisure each week, because he was now relieved of his manual labour in the garden.

Ta Tung took an early opportunity to see his aunt and his friends in the country, and went to call at Madame Wu's house when he had a second free afternoon. It was Lotus Fragrance whom he wanted to see, but Shiao Ming and his mother were there for company. Madame Wu, who was now very old but still domineering, was surprised to see the boy.

"Why, Ta Tung, I thought you were in prison!"

"No, Grandmother," replied Ta Tung "I went to a school—a missionary school."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mother," put in Li Ming's widow. "It was his uncle Kang who was imprisoned for a few days, you have always confused them in your mind."

"Was it? I forgot," said Madame Wu. "You are in a missionary school now?"

"It's a place where 'barbarian devils' teach boys to smoke opium," answered her daughter.

"Is it? What a shame!" exclaimed Madame Wu.

"No!" protested Ta Tung. "It's true that there are a few foreigners there, but they are not barbarous and nobody is allowed to smoke in school, not even water pipes, let alone opium."

"But I remember your . . . Shiao Ming's father told me that when the barbarian British devil traders' delegate wanted us to allow his people to come to China, our Prince Kung said to him, 'If your people do not come as missionaries who sell opium, they are welcome' . . ."

"No!" corrected Ta Tung. "I remember too. Prince Kung said: 'If your people do not come as missionaries or as opium sellers, they are welcome.' Missionaries do not approve of opium smoking at all. It is only the English merchants who are opium traders."

"Missionaries," said Madame Wu. "I think I know what they are. They are barbarian quacks who heal people with mysterious treatments and cures and then cut out the eyeballs of the dead to make them into their medicine."

"No," her daughter said hurriedly. "They use the eyeballs to make silver out of lead. They give one hundred and thirty taels of silver to any Chinese who agrees to 'eat religion' and become a Christian, and when the man dies the barbarian missionary will come and collect his eyeballs."

"That is quite untrue," said Ta Tung. "I have 'eaten religion' and am a Christian now, and I know it's pure nonsense."

"You don't mean to say you have 'eaten religion' and become a Christian?" Everybody in the middle chamber joined in to inquire in surprise

"Yes," answered Ta Tung. "And don't you believe such ridiculous stories Cutting out eyeballs to make silver out of lead! It is a scientific impossibility."

By the common people, to be converted is generally

called "to eat religion" Perhaps such a phrase had its origin because some early Chinese Christians were people who could not make a living, and when they became Christians they immediately found they "had rice to eat"

It was with great difficulty that Ta Tung made them understand that foreigners, like Chinese, are reasonable human beings who, at worst, have their own peculiar customs and traditions. But their strange appearance and queer ways of life made the ignorant sceptical. Chinese ladies of good family, who seldom have a chance to see strangers, could hardly hope to meet a foreigner. The description of such a ridiculous people, as given by those who had seen them, sounded almost unbelievable. Madame Wu wanted confirmation from Ta Tung, who now had first-hand knowledge of them.

"Do these barbarian people actually have red hair?" she asked.

"Yes," Ta Tung answered. "Mrs. Ma's is yellowish red, and Mr Ma's is rather brownish."

"How peculiar!" Madame exclaimed "And are their eyes green?"

"Greenish blue, I should say"

"And they are hairy all over, like a gorilla?"

"Well, their hands seem to be more so than ours, but I don't know about the other parts of their persons."

"How about the food, Ta Tung?" asked Li Ming's wife. "Do they really eat big pieces of raw beef?"

"Not exactly. Large slices of beef steak, rather underdone . . ."

"And they have soup first, instead of last as we do?"

"Yes."

"And instead of using chopsticks, they use knives and scissors?"

"Knives and forks"

"And the man wears the skirt while the woman wears trousers or long gowns?"

"Mr Ma generally wears coat and trousers, but occasionally he wears a tartan skirt. He is Scottish. Mrs. Ma always wears a long dress, not quite like our gowns, and very rarely wears breeches."

"If it wasn't you who tell us, we could scarcely believe it" There was an important point in her mind which she wanted clarified "Since they seem to be our opposites in everything, do they laugh when they are sorry and weep when they are happy?"

"Certainly not. They may be a little different in appearance, but they are just like us at heart"

"We don't know what is in their heart. For instance, our priests and monks encourage the common people to do good, and these missionaries protect and harbour thieves and rascals, and they call that religion."

"That is not quite right. The missionaries are anxious to convert people into Christians with good intentions. But there are some unscrupulous ones who, hoping to induce more people to come to them, try to protect them even when they break the law. Whenever there are law-suits between Christians and non-Christians, such missionaries naturally come to the rescue of their converts and do their best to defend them. The French Catholics go so far as to sit side by side with the judges if cases are concerned with anyone of their religion"

"Now that you have 'eaten religion' and become a Christian, can the Magistrate still arrest you?" Lotus Fragrance put in

"Of course not," her mother answered "He now belongs to the barbarians"

"I don't know," Ta Tung said. "They could perhaps get me out if I was arrested, but I don't know that I belong to them"

"How did you become a Christian?" Lotus Fragrance was thrilled to hear that Ta Tung seemed to be immune from the Chinese law.

"Very simply. Just by being baptised."

"Did they bath you in a big basin of water?"

"No . . ." began Ta Tung, but Li Ming's widow knew better.

"They blindfold you and lead you to the brink of a pond. The Father . . . that is a barbarian devil . . . utters some charm and pushes you into the water."

"No!" protested Ta Tung. "It wasn't like that at all. They . . ."

"But I know a woman who was baptised like that. In fact, she died soon afterwards because it was on a winter's day and she caught a deadly chill."

"You are wrong . . ." Ta Tung was trying to explain.

"She is right," said Madame Wu. "All the barbarian devils have big ponds in their houses. I remember being told that they took their baths in these ponds . . . and men and women went to bathe together. Shameless creatures they are!"

"Do they go and bathe together?" inquired Shiao Ming
"What fun!"

"No!" Ta Tung said "It's the Japanese who have mixed bathing, not the Europeans."

"If the Japanese do, they must all do!" exclaimed Madame Wu. "They are all barbarians"

Ta Tung had to turn the conversation on to classes and lessons and he told them that the system of teaching was very good. He said that they had music, drawing, games and physical training, in addition to Chinese, English, science, history and geography. The elders were not much impressed, but the two youngsters, Shiao Ming and Lotus Fragrance, seemed to have had a revelation. Shiao Ming, who was still having a new tutor in the beginning

of each year, was particularly interested in this school. Music, games and drawing included in the curriculum sounded too good to be true. He said to his mother:

"I like such a school. Instead of having a tutor next year, why not let me join Ta Tung at his school?"

"Nonsense, my boy!" said Madame Wu. "We don't want you to 'eat religion' and turn into a horrible Christian!"

"But you needn't be a Christian to enter the school," put in Ta Tung. "I was made to be a Christian because I couldn't afford to pay the school fees. Most of the rich students in our school are not Christians. The moment I can earn some money and pay my fees, I'll resign my Christianity."

"Could you really enter the school without being a Christian, Ta Tung?" inquired Lotus Fragrance. "How I wish there were such a school for girls!"

"Yes," replied Ta Tung. "There is. Mrs. Ma is running a girls' private school not far away."

"I want to go to the missionary school! I want to go to the missionary school!" cried Shiao Ming and Lotus Fragrance in chorus

At first their requests met with strong rebuffs, but when Ta Tung explained to Madame Wu that the school was really not so bad as they imagined it to be, and when Lotus Fragrance's mother, who was usually silent, said that this would save the children from wasting their precious time at home, Madame Wu at last consented to go and see these schools first before deciding what to do.

When Ta Tung was leaving them, Shiao Ming asked him in a whisper

"Ta Tung, tell me, as man to man, were you lying when you denied that they had mixed bathing in your school?"

Madame Wu's desire to visit the schools with a view to

sending her grandchildren there was conveyed to Mr. Ma by Ta Tung, and on the following day Mrs. Ma tendered a hearty invitation to Madame Wu and her whole family. As a visit like this would be scarcely formal without the escort of a man, Madame Wu ordered her son to conduct the grand tour.

The long train of sedan-chairs transformed the school porter into a very polite and amiable person. He ushered the family into the reception room and hurried to tell Mr. and Mrs. Ma of the arrival of the visitors. Madame Wu suggested that they should look about stealthily before the foreigners came out, and should the schools prove to be what they suspected, they could go home without going through the undesirable procedure of meeting the barbarian devil and the she-devil.

But before they could do anything of the sort, Mr. and Mrs. Ma had come out. When Mrs. Ma tried to shake hands with the ladies, they were very much surprised and refused to do so. However, Madame Wu's son seemed to enjoy this barbarous salute immensely, and Mrs. Ma had to withdraw her squashed hand with determination and strength. When Mr. Ma started to offer his big hand—and it was indeed very hairy—the ladies nearly fainted, and Madame Wu ordered her son to do all the shaking for the whole party with Mr. Ma.

Madame Wu was surprised to find the foreign couple speaking fluent though queerly accented Chinese. She regretted this, because now she could not possibly express her candid opinion aloud without offending her host and hostess. Mrs. Ma was very hospitable and insisted on asking the party to have some tea at her house before inspecting the schools. Madame Wu would have preferred not to accept it at all, but she had to follow her son, who was already walking to the house side by side with the hostess.

Entering the smallish sitting-room in their private residence, Madame Wu heard her son burst into uproarious laughter. The hostess was puzzled and asked for the reason of the mirth, and the ladies arrived to find themselves greatly embarrassed by the sight of Mr. Wu pointing out to Mrs. Ma a pair of lady's trousers and a skirt—both in lovely coloured satin and exquisitely embroidered—hanging over the backs of two big chairs.

"Why are you laughing?" Mrs. Ma inquired.

Choked with laughter, Mr. Wu pointed repeatedly at the garments.

"Aren't they lovely? Marvellous handwork you have!" remarked Mrs. Ma

"They are ladies' garments for the lower part of the body. It's indecent to display them in public like that!" Mr. Wu managed to suppress his laughter when he saw the hostess was looking at him without a smile.

"Oh! You have queer ideas. We regard them as works of art, and I put them there especially to please you," said Mrs. Ma to her guests

The Chinese ladies felt very uncomfortable during their stay when realising that such garments were there in full display. They finished their tea hurriedly by taking one single sip and without touching the cakes and other refreshments. They started to thank their hostess and host, and asked to be conducted to see the schools.

Though the tea-party was not as successful as Mrs. Ma thought, Madame Wu could not find any fault with the school. The children were looking for the bathrooms with apprehension, and to Lotus Fragrance's relief, as well as to Shiao Ming's disappointment, they were not at all what they were reputed to be. When the party came to the boys' school, Ta Tung was ordered to join in to explain things to his people.

When Ta Tung had seen the visitors off, he noticed

that the school porter was smiling at him for the first time.

As a result of this reception, Mr. and Mrs. Ma were pleased to learn that, during the next term, they were expecting two full-fee students. And because of his having rich relatives, Ta Tung was allowed by the authorities of the school to teach history and geography in the lowest form. For this extra service, he was generously paid by the school a salary which, when very carefully handled, would enable the young man to accept no pocket money from his aunt. He was greatly pleased at this promotion, and hastened to write to his uncle about it.

When the new term began, both Shiao Ming and Lotus Fragrance went to their respective new schools. They registered on the opening day punctually, not because they couldn't pay the fine, but because they were so anxious to start something new. Although Lotus Fragrance was enjoying her school life even more than she expected to, Shiao Ming found it rather disappointing. Firstly, he was mortified to know that he had to start from the very beginning—he was put in the lowest form in the school—and then it simply staggered him to learn that Ta Tung was to be his teacher in several subjects.

In a missionary school the arrangement of the time-table for the lessons is rather peculiar. It has been the custom of such schools in China to pay special attention to the language of the country to which the mission belongs, while Chinese, the children's mother tongue, is always treated as no more than an auxiliary. In the morning, the best time of the day, English or French, which ever language the missionary speaks, and mathematics and science, are taught by the better-paid teachers, in the afternoon Chinese and other lighter subjects are given by assistants and recently graduated self-supporting students.

Shiao Ming wasn't a very studious pupil, and in the

warm afternoon, directly after he had had a big lunch, when he came to Ta Tung's classes he was always drowsy and preferred to have a nice little nap instead of paying any attention to his lessons. Ta Tung had the audacity to advise Shiao Ming to behave properly in the classroom, but when such words had no effect, Ta Tung was so tactless as to use a sterner tone. Of course Shiao Ming was not to be bullied by a wretched fisherman's son and naturally felt greatly insulted when he thought that he, a full-fee student, had to listen to the reproach of a self-supporter. As there was no chance of getting fair-play in the classroom, he decided to settle their account in the playground, where they could meet "as man to man". It was not the practice of the Select People to mix with the lowest of the low, but Shiao Ming did it purposely so as to pick quarrels with his enemy.

The unwritten laws of such a school are these. When a full-fee student quarrels with a half-fee student, no matter who is wrong, the half-fee student is to be punished. But when he quarrels with a self-supporter, then woe to the self-supporter. As it was impossible for Ta Tung to avoid Shiao Ming altogether, and it was even more impossible for him not to defend himself when assaulted, Ta Tung was regarded by Mr. Wang as the disgrace of the school.

Life in the school would now have been unbearable to Ta Tung had he not had the consolation of seeing Lotus Fragrance once a week at the chapel on Sundays, and also of correcting her Chinese papers, which was always a pleasure to the boy. Lotus Fragrance, too, enjoyed her Sunday mornings in the chapel, not because she cared at all for "Our Lord in Heaven", but her mind always remained on earth and particularly at the back of the house, where the hard benches were.

Except on Sundays, the only other chance for Lotus

Fragrance to have contact with Ta Tung was at the Saturday afternoon "socials" at the Principal's private residence. It was Mrs Ma's idea that the girls should be trained to be hospitable, and every Saturday a small tea-party was given in which the bigger girls were to be the hostesses. The self-supporters, of course, had to come, not as guests, but to render help to these delicate young ladies who were never accustomed to the slightest exertion. On such occasions, Lotus Fragrance, who was always the life of the party, and whose painting had become the chief attraction in Mrs. Ma's drawing-room, would have the satisfaction of exchanging a few words with Ta Tung, but would also encounter the eternal embarrassment of hearing the argument between Mr and Mrs. Ma, the husband thought her father a boorish person, while the wife said he was simply charming. Mr. Ma would remark that he could never understand why the man should laugh so rudely at the exquisitely embroidered skirt and trousers, and his wife would explain that he must have had an excessive sense of humour.

CHAPTER VII

*"We appreciate our own writings
But prefer other men's wives."*

IN the twenty-third year of Kwang Hsu (1897), when Shiao Ming was seventeen and Lotus Fragrance sixteen, Madame Wu began to contemplate the desirability of uniting the young couple. She called her daughter, son and daughter-in-law to her and told them of her wish.

Shiao Ming's mother, though she disliked Lotus Fragrance's queer nativity, had grown to love the girl dearly. Nobody who had seen Lotus Fragrance, and particularly

got to know her, could do otherwise. As she grew up, her rebellious and mischievous ways of childhood developed into a strong and clear-cut character. She had the ardour and cordiality of her tyrannical grandmother, and the tolerance and affection of her amiable mother. The age of sixteen, known as "the age of two eights", is the beginning of the golden season of life for a girl. And at sixteen, Lotus Fragrance revealed that outwardly she had inherited the classical beauty of her exquisite mother and the admirable demeanour of her dignified grandmother, with an additional charm and freshness of her own.

It is not only the beautiful form that counts, for people care little for beauty that is only skin deep. For instance, there was Little Rainbow, a very pretty bondmaid who had come to the service of the family some years ago when Blue Pearl was married off. She was only a few years older than Lotus Fragrance and looked in many respects as if she had been modelled after her young mistress—so much so that from a distance people could not distinguish the one from the other except by the dresses. Her cheeks were shaped like two melon seeds, her eyes, two pools of autumn water; her eyebrows, a pair of willow leaves; and her mouth, a tiny ripe cherry broken in two. Her shoulders sloped downwards, forming two curves, and her waist was slender and pliant. Every movement of her arms and hands was graceful, and her fingers looked like the early shoots of young bamboo in the spring. But while Lotus Fragrance, young though she might be, was every inch a great lady of a good family, Little Rainbow was clearly ill-born and ill-bred from the marrow of her bones. At first, when Shiao Ming had just entered into early manhood, he used to be taken by the beauty of this maid, and her loose nature contributed much to an improper liaison which existed for some time between her and the boy. But being a connoisseur, Shiao Ming soon

found out that he really wanted someone like Lotus Fragrance, and began to avoid meeting the bondmaid while paying court to her young mistress. Unfortunately Lotus Fragrance was too young to appreciate such attentions.

It was therefore only reasonable that Li Ming's widow should entirely disregard the private arrangement she had agreed to when her husband was alive, and she readily told her mother that nothing would please her better than an early wedding of Shiao Ming and Lotus Fragrance. Besides, she was only too eager to see a grandson, and would have suggested the same thing had her mother neglected this important matter. She knew how much her son wanted Lotus Fragrance.

Her brother smiled and seemed greatly gratified to see his daughter so much sought after. But Lotus Fragrance's mother looked at her sister-in-law in a somewhat alarmed manner and was taken aback by the suddenly changed policy of Shiao Ming's mother. After some hesitation, she was obliged to remind her sister-in-law.

"But there is no need for such a hurry. My daughter is still very young and perhaps it is better to wait until the three children have finished their schooling. I think my sister-in-law had other arrangements in mind . . ."

"Three children?" Madame Wu was surprised. "And what other arrangements, pray? Don't you dare to mention that bastard to me!"

Li Ming's widow signalled to her sister-in-law to forget the "other arrangement", and Mr Wu put in.

"I treated it as a joke. Of course we have long forgotten such a ridiculous whim of my excellent late brother-in-law."

"Still, Lotus Fragrance is barely sixteen, we must wait for a few years . . ." his wife maintained.

"All right. Let the marriage be consummated in a year's

time. Even that is too far for me. And let me hear no more of your excuses." Madame had the last words.

She attributed her daughter-in-law's objection to the natural love of a mother for her child, and said she could quite understand that a mother would not want to marry off her only daughter. So she ordered Li Ming's widow to give the nativities of the children to a fortune-teller and ask him to select an auspicious date during the next year for the happy event. When an astrologer was consulted, he told Shiao Ming's mother that the most propitious month for the girl to marry would be the 12th moon of the year. Shiao Ming's mother, who was very anxious to see the ceremony completed, said that would be much too long to wait, so they decided to have the wedding this year rather than the next.

The astrologer, after having carefully consulted many books and after having studied the nativities of both the boy and the girl, told the woman that the 24th of the 12th moon of this year would be particularly suitable. As both bride and bridegroom-to-be were astrologically-speaking somewhat peculiarly "aspected", that day, which was known as the Lesser New Year's Day, was the only day on which the wedding could be performed without causing an injury to other members of the two families. The woman was satisfied and the astrologer accordingly wrote down the date on a piece of red paper. She took it with great care, and after paying the man for his services, she went to report to her mother.

"Mother, congratulations. Here is the lucky date for the children's wedding."

Madame Wu took the paper and asked her daughter to tell her the date as she could not wait to find her glasses to read it

"The 24th of the 12th moon, Mother."

"But that would be too far off. It means nearly two

years from now. Couldn't he find a date earlier next year?"

"No, he said he couldn't. But I told him if it had to be in the last moon of the year, it was better to have it this year instead of next, so the date is actually the 24th of the 12th moon of this year, and not so very far off as we thought. And think, Mother, the young couple will be doubly happy when they are to be united just before the New Year Festival."

"I don't like the date. You know, it is the Lesser New Year's Day, which is a day on which all the poor families marry their children. It is, in fact, the only date in the whole year into which you needn't look for fear there is any evil spirit exercising his influence at the time. Therefore the poor people, who cannot afford to consult an astrologer, invariably marry their children on that day. You have been swindled by the man. I don't like the date at all."

"But, Mother, I'm afraid he has looked up all his books carefully, and he told me that was the only possible date he could find when taking into consideration the nativities of the bride and groom."

"Oh! That is bad. Very bad indeed!" mused Madame Wu. "Well, since it seems to have been decided already, let us hurry on with the preparations."

When Lotus Fragrance's mother heard of this, she tried again, more desperately than ever, to dissuade them. As she realised it was impossible to call off the wedding indefinitely, she begged once more for just a few years' delay, because the children were still too young to marry. But her words had no effect and her mother-in-law said sternly:

"I wonder whether you realise that I am nearly eighty-four years old and that now I quite often detect the aroma of the earth. This means that my grave is calling for me.

I do not want to die before I see these children happily married. Don't let me hear you speak against this again."

As she could not possibly argue with her mother-in-law, the only way left open to her was to inform her daughter that when Li Ming was alive, the secret arrangement was that Lotus Fragrance was to be betrothed to Ta Tung. The girl, on hearing this news from her mother, protested and cried in front of her grandmother, but as it would never do for young ladies of good family to mention frankly whom they wanted to marry, what could a little girl of sixteen do? She repeatedly swore that she would never marry but would remain an old maid. But that is always the attitude of bashful young maidens. They never mean what they say.

Madame Wu was projecting the important affair on a grand scale, and it was on her advice that her daughter bought a piece of ground near-by and planned to build a new house on it for the home of the young couple and their descendants to come. Madame Wu succeeded even in getting her prodigal son to stay at home for a few months to help them, and everybody seemed happy except Lotus Fragrance and her mother. After a few terrible rows with her grandmother, the girl suddenly became rather silent, and they said that the bride-to-be had now given her full consent, as is the way of all rebellious young ladies.

When the framework of the new building was finished, they selected a lucky day to lay the highest beam in the house. As a rule, a feast is given to the carpenters and masons and a special ceremony is performed. Friends and relatives came with their presents and Madame Wu was one of the happy guests who were there to see the ceremony and congratulate the owner. Just when the cedar beam was laid, a pair of magpies, known in China

as "birds of happiness", alighting on the beam of cedar cried continuously "Che, che! Che, che!"

"Look, Mother," said the proud daughter. "A pair of birds of happiness come to my home at the auspicious moment. I think I'm sure to be a grandmother some time next year."

"Chase them away, chase them away!" cried the old woman in alarm. "They are bringing you ill-omen"

"Oh, Mother, you are indeed doting," reproached her happy daughter. "Crows, now, are birds of ill omen. But these are magpies. They bring us happiness!"

"No, my daughter," said Madame Wu gravely. "You don't realise that on such an occasion a crow is welcome, for it cries, 'Ka, ka' (*meaning 'extend'*) while a magpie is not, because it cries 'Che, che!' (*meaning 'destroy'*)"

The old woman was right, the sound of the magpie was now definitely "Destroy, destroy!" They chased the birds away, but they left the proud owner of the house somewhat dejected.

A well-known Chinese proverb runs as follows

"Clear understanding of worldly affairs is as good as academic knowledge;

Abundant experience in social intercourse is equal to literary learning."

Shiao Ming was a strict follower of such teachings. Unlike Ta Tung, whom he regarded as a useless bookworm boring blindly into one volume after another, Shiao Ming kept his eyes wide open to the ways of life, and had acquired an extensive knowledge and experience which Ta Tung could never hope to gain by reading. Since Shiao Ming had grown up and become intimate with some of the sons of the richest and most influential families of the city in his school, he led a very happy,

interesting and, he hoped, useful life. The young companions, with plenty of money and very little to do after four o'clock every day, used to explore, in the vicinity of the school, secret places into which only money could open the way. The school authorities were gratified to see them so religious, always attending Sunday service, and never dreamed that this was the boys' only excuse for not returning home at all during the week-ends. While their parents were happy to know that they were purifying their minds under the guidance of God, they did not realise that these young philosophers were furthermore "discussing social problems", as such delightful meetings were termed by the youngsters, with easy-going girls of poor families. The entertaining of the rich students had long since been developed into quite a prosperous profession in the neighbourhood of the missionary school.

This little conspiracy was in fact a popular movement, for it was known to the porter, the cooks, the gardener, the servants, the laundry people, the pedlars and the tradesmen near the school. They were delighted to see the artificial barriers of social distinctions being wiped away in this manner, and heartily welcomed these intrigues in order to extort a little more money than they normally earned. It was only the school authorities, and such stupid students as Ta Tung, whom it was not worth while to let into the secret, and were entirely ignorant of the important work these rich young men were doing.

Shiao Ming had come into the world on account of an act of philanthropy, and he was therefore an even greater philanthropist than his father. He spent his money so generously that it would have shocked his father to death had the old man been still alive. It was no wonder that all the girls in the vicinity adored such a kind and nice boy. Being so popular among the fair sex, he could not under-

stand why Lotus Fragrance, towards whom he had an ardent desire of possession, would never allow him to make the slightest approach to her. Though she was sweet to all her girl friends and even amiable to the boys at the socials in Mrs. Ma's house, to Shiao Ming she was as cold as frost and ice. When they were at home, since they had now definitely become affianced, she began to avoid him as if he were poison. Shiao Ming once complained of this to his grandmother, and the elderly lady explained that according to the old traditional commandment, "male and female must not touch each other".

Since hearing that the arrangements for the wedding of Shiao Ming and Lotus Fragrance were in progress, Ta Tung had become more silent and rather pensive. What was he to do, what could he do? Remembering the cold attitude his uncle had assumed towards Lotus Fragrance, Ta Tung tried, at first, to forget her by reading a little more. More and more often he would see the image of the girl appear in his book, and especially at night, which he used to consider the best time for his studies, he found dismal thoughts about Lotus Fragrance continually distracting his attention.

Whenever he could not concentrate his mind on his book he put it down and wrote letters instead. He wrote to his uncle, Li Kang, in Kan-chow, much more frequently than before, and initiated as much correspondence as he could with his uncle's friends. By now a postal service had been installed, and the charge for sending letters to distant places was greatly reduced, while the speed of their delivery greatly increased. He soon learned from these friends that quite a number of them were at this moment in Peking, the capital, and it seemed that a movement for a General Reform was brewing. He wrote to Li Ti-Mo-Tai to ask him about this, and the Englishman told him that it was very likely, and that he himself might

be in the capital early in the following year. Li Ti-Mo-Tai was eager to assist in the promotion of such a movement.

Ta Tung had been studying books on law and constitution, and was now deeply interested in the various forms of government. It must be remembered that China, for many thousands of years, had always had only one form of government—that of a monarchy. As Ta Tung began to plunge into politics he found very soon that the thought of Lotus Fragrance's coming marriage was gradually fading from his mind. However, there were times when he and Lotus Fragrance had to meet, and her appealing glances at him would greatly upset him. He only wished that he could as successfully avoid her as she avoided Shiao Ming.

As the wedding drew near, Ta Tung tried his best to keep his distance from Lotus Fragrance whenever they were in the same room. It happened that at one of those Saturday tea-parties in Mrs. Ma's house, when Lotus Fragrance was serving tea to the young guests, Shiao Ming, who was one of them, was paying her his usual sarcastic compliments, and the girl was as embarrassed as she was angry. Trying to engage Shiao Ming in conversation with herself, Mrs. Ma teasingly remarked that she had heard Shiao Ming was going to marry and that she hoped the boy would be happy and would remember the Christian teachings he had received at school and not take any concubines, as so many rich heathen did. Shiao Ming laughed and said pointedly—

“Why not? The old proverb says ‘A wife is never as good as a concubine, and a concubine is never as good as a mistress’ . . .”

“Oh!” Mrs. Ma was shocked. “You naughty boy! If I were a Chinese girl, I would take as many secondary husbands as my husband should take concubines.”

"Very well, Mrs Ma, I have no objection to that arrangement," Shiao Ming laughed. "But we have this advantage over you. God created us in such a way that when we have many children, I shall be able to tell which child belongs to which mother, whereas Lotus Fragrance won't be able to distinguish which child belongs to which father!"

While the girls blushed with embarrassment and the boys could scarcely suppress their laughter, Lotus Fragrance burst into tears. She turned to Mrs. Ma, asked to be excused and hurriedly prepared to go home. Mrs. Ma tried to smooth the matter by asking Shiao Ming to apologise, but the boy only continued to laugh. When Mrs. Ma saw that she could not possibly persuade Lotus Fragrance to stay any longer, and that the girl was sobbing her heart out, she told Ta Tung, who was as usual helping at the party, to see her home. As he was related to the girl, Mrs Ma thought her choice was very good she never dreamt that Shiao Ming was looking daggers at her.

Ta Tung gave up his work and reluctantly escorted Lotus Fragrance out of the school grounds. When they were walking through a long lane leading from the school to the main street, Ta Tung cursed Mrs Ma and himself. He had been trying his best to get out of this entanglement, and lo, there he was in it again. Lotus Fragrance wiped her eyes continuously and glanced at Ta Tung with tenderness and reproach. Suddenly footsteps came nearer. Ta Tung looked around and saw that Shiao Ming was running after them.

"Hey!" shouted Shiao Ming, panting and in a rage. "Where are you going with my wife?"

Ta Tung decided not to quarrel with him and bore the insinuation with fortitude.

"Don't be ridiculous, Shiao Ming! You know she is

going home and that Mrs. Ma has asked me to escort ”

“Why did Mrs. Ma pick upon you of all the men .. ?”

“Stop it, Shiao Ming!” Ta Tung interrupted him. “I have some lessons to do. Now that you have come, be a gentleman as you always pretend to be, and escort her home.”

With these words, Ta Tung turned back, not daring to meet Lotus Fragrance’s eyes. But she protested:

“No, Ta Tung! Come with me!”

“I’m sorry, Lotus Fragrance, but I have to go.” Ta Tung knew it was now or never. He decided it was better “now”.

Shiao Ming went up to Lotus Fragrance, and before she could move, held her tightly in his arms and kissed her violently on both cheeks. She screamed and cried

“Help, Ta Tung! Help! Help!”

Ta Tung now realised that after all it was best to be “never”. No matter how hard-hearted he was, he found he could not possibly refrain from helping a woman—let alone when the woman was someone whom he secretly loved. Had she been reproaching him, he thought perhaps he could have resisted that. But when he saw her in distress and asking for his help, he must be heartless to remain aloof.

Ta Tung was not heartless and he hurried forward to intervene.

“Hands off her, you rogue!”

“I’m kissing my wife. What has that to do with you? You fisherman’s brat!” retorted Shiao Ming.

At this moment, Lotus Fragrance broke away from Shiao Ming’s hold and ran to Ta Tung’s side.

“You dirty swine! Who’s your wife? You dirty swine!”

“Keep away from her if you want to save your skin, you rogue!” Ta Tung urged Lotus Fragrance forward

and walked behind her to form a rear-guard.

Shiao Ming cursed and abused them as much as he could, but kept away from them at a safe distance. As soon as Ta Tung had seen Lotus Fragrance home, he turned suddenly back on Shiao Ming. That young gentleman was taken unawares: Ta Tung thrashed him severely. He yelled and wailed as loud as he could, but when people came to his assistance they only found him covered with bruises, his assailant had vanished.

When Lotus Fragrance told her grandmother about Shiao Ming's remarks in the school and his behaviour in the street, Madame Wu said that Lotus Fragrance must not take jokes too seriously, and that she never approved of young girls of good families "exposing" themselves in the street. It was, she added, in fact her own fault because she had not come home in a sedan chair. Lotus Fragrance could only find understanding and comfort from her mother, who unfortunately could do nothing for her but hold her in her arms and cry with her bitterly.

From now on, Ta Tung deemed it his duty to look after Lotus Fragrance. She was obstinate, and insisted upon walking to the school on Monday morning and walking home on Sunday after chapel. Her obstinacy was perhaps a kind of disguised tactics, for she seemed to enjoy telling Ta Tung what risk she was running because she knew that Shiao Ming would certainly try to insult her again. But Ta Tung did not enjoy the weekly walks. He was doing this with desperate resignation.

However, Lotus Fragrance was doing Shiao Ming an injustice in thinking that the boy would try to insult her in the street again. He was such a perfect young gentleman that he was even generous enough to forgive Ta Tung, who had so severely thrashed him. While Ta Tung remained so rude to him as not to cast a look his way or

speak to him, he approached Ta Tung one day and said very cordially:

"Ta Tung, I heard you had mentioned to several of your friends that you wanted to go to Peking, where a new university is to be established. I think such a brilliant scholar as you should enter the highest academic establishment instead of wasting your valuable time in this old missionary hole. You don't want to follow the footsteps of that weasel, Old Wang, and stay here all your life, do you? I was told that he is still carrying on with his research work here, besides practically running the school. He was awarded the degree of 'B.A.' and is studying for his 'M A.' under Mr. Ma!"

"Younger brother, things are easier said than done." Ta Tung was surprised to find that Shiao Ming bore him no malice. "You know for two years I have managed to study here because I was made a self-supporting student. To depend upon the charity of the Mission is something I loathe. However much I would like to go to Peking, what can be done about it? Uncle Kang is not well off, and I vowed not to touch his hard-earned salary."

"If it is only a question of finance, Ta Tung, I could help you."

"That is very generous of you, younger brother, but I cannot accept anybody's help"

"Why not? We are brothers and you are entitled to some of the money my father left me. Would a hundred taels be enough to start with?"

"More than enough. But how can I take your money?"

"Treat it as a loan which you may repay any time at your convenience. And you can have some more later on."

"A loan? I'll think it over"

But when Shiao Ming wanted a thing to be done, he would not leave it until it was done thoroughly. On the

following Saturday evening he gave a farewell party in a restaurant near the school to his foster brother, Ta Tung. Friends of both young men were invited, and Shiao Ming proved to be an excellent host. He drank numerous cups of wine with his guests, and wished again and again that Ta Tung would have a fair wind all the way and great success in his new adventure. Everybody was very happy, and Ta Tung now felt that it left him no choice but to accept gratefully Shiao Ming's kind offer.

One point, however, was brought up by a fellow self-supporter. It was pointed out that the school authorities might not let Ta Tung go. Ta Tung had received a free education from the missionaries for two years, and he was bound to give some service to the school or mission when he left them, otherwise they would demand payment for the tuition and boarding-fees which had been exempted. But Shiao Ming said it was no matter. Let Ta Tung go away secretly first, and he would be responsible for the repayment of fees.

"No," said Ta Tung, "I can't burden you with that. I'll go and talk the matter over with Mr Ma before I leave."

"And if he raises any objection, I'll pay for you."

"We'll see about that" Ta Tung said no more.

One day Lotus Fragrance came back late from her walk with Ta Tung from the school. The moment she saw her mother alone in her room, the girl burst into a torrent of tears. The lady patted her daughter on the back and said softly

"Tell me, my dear heart, what is the matter?"

"Oh . . . oh . . . mother! The brute! . . . He is a brute!"

"Did Shiao Ming attack you again, my dear heart?"

"No! It's not Shiao Ming . . . it's Ta Tung . . . the brute!"

Her mother smiled sadly and remarked philosophically:
“Never mind, my dear heart! You know, all the crows
in this world are equally black.”

“No,” protested her daughter. “You don’t understand,
mother.” She sobbed loudly.

“Now steady, my dear heart. Tell me, what did Ta
Tung do to you?”

“No . . . mother . . . The brute! . . . He didn’t do
anything.”

“You foolish child! What did you expect him to do?”

“I told him . . . that . . . unless he was going to take
me away . . . I should do something dreadful. I said that
the thought of having a husband like Shiao Ming . . .
would drive me to desperation. And he tried to talk
about something else.”

“Perhaps he was wise. Where could you go?”

“He was selfish. I knew he wanted to go to Peking by
himself and leave me here to marry that rascal.”

“But he doesn’t know . . .” her mother stopped
abruptly.

“He doesn’t know what?”

“He doesn’t know that you love him so much . . .”

“But he does! I told him that I would follow him to
the end of the earth and to the border of Heaven, and
that I don’t mind his being poor . . .”

“My dear heart! Do you really love him as much as
that?”

“Of course, mother. I love him much more than that,
the brute!”

“Do you really think you would be happy with him if
you are going to be poor . . . very poor . . . sacrificing
all the luxuries you have been used to . . .?”

“Of course! Of course, mother! I have already given
up my luxuries. I walk instead of taking a sedan chair.
And I have saved up all my pocket money for him”

"I wish I could give you some money, my dear heart, but I haven't a single piece of cash."

"I know, mother I think I'm going to die. The brute, he was quite unmoved when I told him that I was going to die."

"You must not die, dear heart! Sometimes to die seems the only way out, and sometimes one must not die because one has duties which must be attended to."

"What do you mean, mother?"

Her mother did not hear the girl's question, and went on:

"Your grandmother is very obstinate. She insisted that you should marry Shiao Ming although I protested again and again. On the 24th of this month you'll be married to him. What can I do?"

She looked at her daughter inquiringly.

On hearing the date, which was very near at hand, Lotus Fragrance was staggered. She had always been hoping there would be an opportunity to break off the engagement, but now it seemed that in not very many days the worst would happen, and it would be an irrevocable step. But how could she tell her grandmother that she had her own choice of a husband? The girl was silent for a while. The mother, taking it as a sign that her daughter was now compelled to consent to this undesirable marriage, felt as if a thousand arrows were piercing her heart at the same time. The more she thought of this, the more horrified she was, and she burst into audible sobs. The girl, seeing her mother in tears, could no longer suppress her own feelings, and they wept together bitterly.

After they had had a heart to heart talk with each other, while the mother was still shedding tears, Lotus Fragrance said desperately:

"Mother, I think the best plan will be for you to tell my grandmother bluntly that I do not love Shiao Ming

and cannot marry him I love Ta Tung and must marry him. Mrs. Ma told me that in the West the young people have entire freedom in marriage. Even their parents cannot force them. For years I have always been afraid of Shiao Ming, and I cannot tell you why my feelings towards him are like that."

"My child, China cannot be compared with any country in the West. We must think of propriety first If a girl declares openly whom she loves and whom she doesn't, she will be condemned by society as shameless. I cannot possibly say that to your grandmother Besides, she has been very kind to me and also your aunt is very nice to us."

"But couldn't we think of some other plan?"

"No."

As for Ta Tung, he had hitherto been trifling with Christianity. He went to chapel simply because he was obliged to do so. He never paid any attention to Mr. Ma's sermons, which he always regarded as rubbish. Neither had he been studying the Bible seriously. Now he began to find that in this book there were more things in common with Confucian teachings than he had thought and he often read certain passages of it over and over again. One Sunday morning he listened to Mr. Ma's preaching carefully. As Lotus Fragrance had not been coming to the chapel for the past few weeks, he gave full attention to the clergyman It was a marvellous piece of oratory, and the text was "Do as you would be done by". Ta Tung considered this teaching much more constructive than the Confucian one, which was rather negative than positive—"Don't do to others what you do not wish to be done to you" Mr. Ma emphasised the duty of a Christian to help his fellow creatures when they were in distress—in dire distress As if he knew Ta Tung was listening with special

attention, he said that unless a man could put himself into the place of another who was in desperate need of help, and ready to take risks and make sacrifices, he was not worthy of the name of man.

Ta Tung was deeply moved, and remained in the chapel until everybody was gone. He went to Mr. Ma before the clergyman left, and asked him if he could have a word with him. It was not because Mr. Ma disliked to waste his precious time on self-supporters, but that he happened to have a very important lunch engagement with a very important man on that day. He asked Ta Tung whether he could speak to him at another time, for Mrs. Ma was waiting outside the chapel and he mustn't keep her waiting there any longer.

Ta Tung said that he had a confession to make and that he also wanted some spiritual guidance. The clergyman nearly uttered a mild exclamation of reproach but asked Ta Tung if he would be very brief. Unfortunately Ta Tung was hoping to discuss the matter with Mr. Ma rather fully, and was not prepared to state the complete case in two or three sentences. He hesitated a little and hardly knew how to begin. Mr. Ma began to be very impatient.

"Make haste, young man. What do you want to confess?"

"Well, as you said just now . . ."

"Never mind what I said just now. Tell me what you have done that you want to repent of."

"No, I haven't done anything that I am sorry for . . ."

"Well, quick, young man, you said you had something to confess. What is it? Out with it."

"I . . . I . . . I love a girl . . ."

"Oh! Calf love! Calf love! Tell me that another time I have to go." He tried to run away, but Ta Tung stopped him.

"Please, Mr Ma, there may not be another time, perhaps I shall not be here any more."

"Don't be silly, young man! Whatever it is, don't do it. I must really go now" He went out of the chapel.

"Please, Mr Ma, but you don't know what it is . . ."
Ta Tung followed him out and saw Mrs. Ma was coming in to see what was detaining her husband

"Sorry, Mary, but the boy kept me for ages. Now let's go."

"What is it that he wants, John?" inquired his wife.

"Oh," replied Mr Ma casually, "calf love, if you want to know"

"Oh! How thrilling, David," she exclaimed with a smile when she saw the boy approaching. "You must tell me the whole story one day."

"Please, Mrs. Ma This is really serious." He made a last appeal to the clergyman's wife "I may never see you again I want your advice."

"Better sleep over it, my boy. Come along, Mary, we shall be late" He went off.

But Mrs. Ma, who was more kindly, said charmingly

"How exciting! I do want to know who the girl is! Come to our house to-night at nine, and let us discuss it over a cup of coffee." She followed her husband.

At nine o'clock that night, Ta Tung knocked at the door of the private residence of Mr and Mrs Ma. The door was opened for him by Mrs Ma herself and she led him into the study where Mr. Ma was writing some letters at his desk. His glasses were on the lowest part of the bridge of his nose, and he had to incline his head as low as possible to look at Ta Tung. Mrs Ma asked him to sit down with her at a little tea-table and coffee was prepared

"Now, David, you must tell us your love story. I'm so anxious to know . . ."

"Mary, please!" said Mr. Ma sternly "David, have you

been thinking it over and realised your folly?"

"I've been thinking about it continuously, and it's no folly, Mr. Ma," replied the boy.

"No folly? Tell me, David, how old are you?"

"I shall be eighteen next spring."

"Do you like black or white?"

"White, please, Mrs. Ma."

"And you said you loved a girl?"

"Yes, Mr. Ma! But I'm nineteen, according to the Chinese method of counting . . ."

"Any sugar?"

"Yes, please, Mrs. Ma."

"And it seemed to me that you were thinking of going away . . . because of her, I presume?"

"Yes, Mr. Ma. But she is . . ."

"One or two lumps, David?"

"Three, please, Mrs. Ma."

"If it were summer, I should suppose that you had had a sun-stroke, but since we are in the midst of a bitterly cold winter, I simply cannot understand you!"

"But, Mr. Ma, she is . . ."

"Enough of that, young man! I don't allow it!"

"John!" interrupted his wife, "please give me a chance to know who is the girl of his heart. You are not allowing the poor boy to finish his sentence; it's not fair to him, and not fair to me, either. I'm dying to know the exciting love story!"

"There isn't much of a love story, Mrs. Ma," said Ta Tung "The girl I love is engaged to be married to somebody whom she does not like . . ."

"How thrilling and complicated! You must tell me more about it, David!" exclaimed Mrs. Ma, now really getting excited.

"This is scandalous, young man! I hope you are now going to repent," said Mr. Ma.

"No, Mr. Ma . . ."

"What? Did you say 'no'?"

"Yes, Mr. Ma, I said 'no,'" answered Ta Tung bravely.
"There was nothing wrong in it, and I have no cause to repent."

"You love the wife . . . the fiancée of somebody, presumably your friend, isn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Ma."

"And you don't repent?"

"But, Mr. Ma, you don't know the facts. She is in great distress, Mr. Ma!"

"Confound her distress! I've no use for the girl who flirts with every young man she meets! It's a scandal!"

"But, Mr. Ma, in your sermon this morning, you said that we must put ourselves in the place of those who were in distress and needed our help . . ."

"That wouldn't apply to such people as flirts and flappers! She is a disgrace to society!"

"I was hesitating and undecided this morning. But your words gave me strength and determination, and I came to you . . ."

"I'm sorry for what I said this morning then, young man. I never dreamed it would have such bad effects"

"After I heard your preaching, I thought you would understand I want your guidance and also I want to tell you that if I have to go away abruptly, I promise you that I will serve the mission for two years sooner or later . . ."

"My advice to you, young man, is 'come to your right senses'. And if you do not heed me, the mission will disown you and get your guarantors to pay up your fees, which would become due the moment you left here without my permission Of all the infernal . . ."

"Ahem! John! On a Sunday?" interrupted his wife.

"I beg your pardon, Mary. Mr Ma checked his anger. "Dr Li Ti-Mo-Tai is also responsible for you He

is an impossible fool! To think of a clergyman abetting such immoral . . .”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Ma. This is not immoral, and Mr. Li Ti-Mo-Tai doesn’t know about it at all. At first I was thinking of going to Peking, to join and work for the Political Reform movement, but recently . . .”

“The Reform movement be blowed!” exclaimed Mr. Ma hotly. “Dr. Li will land himself in hot water soon. In fact, he has been in it once already, and he is a fool who’ll never profit even by experience. No self-respecting clergyman would mix himself in heathen politics. He ought to confine his work to the service of God.”

“The Reform is for the good of humanity, therefore it is also the service of God.”

“Humanity! It would be humanity indeed to give both you and Dr. Li a good thrashing.”

“John!” exclaimed his wife again. “You can’t . . .”

“Let me alone, Mary! I know what I am saying. I’ve no time to waste on you, David. But let me tell you that I do not allow such nonsense in my school. I can’t stop you by force, but remember, somebody has to be responsible for you, and I’m going to write to your guarantors and Dr. Li immediately . . .”

“John! Don’t be so cruel. The boy is no more than a child, and I’m sure this is his first affair. Now, David, tell me more of your romantic story . . .”

“Mary, if you don’t stop this nonsense, I must ask you to leave my study. I have some letters to write.”

“I’m sorry,” said Ta Tung bitterly. “It’s a mistake I must go. Thank you, Mr. Ma.”

“You must tell me more about it one day, David.” Mrs. Ma got up to see the boy out while her husband ignored his visitor completely. “It sounds like a romance of gallantry by Dumas’! Just about the time I was to be married, I longed to have somebody falling hopelessly in

love with me. But I never had a chance. In our village there was only the postman, but he was too old and he had a wife and family of three. And when we started on our honeymoon, I tried to encourage a very nice page boy—he was a little too young, I know, but I had no choice. The wretch, he dared not even look at me! I wish you had been there, David. Good night, David, and better luck next time."

But Ta Tung had already gone out of the house.

CHAPTER VIII

*"The strict injunctions of thy parents must be respected,
And the trustworthy advice of thy go-betweens must be
followed"*

FUNERALS and weddings are two important ceremonies which must never be neglected. Even in families whose existence is strictly from hand to mouth, such an occasion calls for some extravagance. It is fitting and proper for such a family to raise a fairly big loan from some of its rich relatives, to be spent chiefly on that single day. Public opinion will support the debtor and be ready to condemn any rich relative who could be so unreasonable as to refuse the loan.

The Wu family was rich, and Madame Wu was well known for her ability in conducting such important functions. Under her management the wedding preparations were going on apace. Like a commander-in-chief planning, in his little tent on the field, a manœuvre on a gigantic scale, Madame Wu directed and projected a thousand things while she was comfortably sitting in her arm-chair in her room. As Li Ming was dead, her daughter very dependent on her, her son utterly useless

and her daughter-in-law very inexperienced, Madame Wu had to look after the affairs of both the bride's and groom's families, and was undertaking the work of four persons. She ordered two silk and two gauze bed-curtains, eight cotton-padded mattresses, eight padded quilts and four pairs of pillows, which were covered with red or green satin and embroidered with birds and flowers. All the materials and patterns were selected by her. Then there were eight bamboo and eight straw mattresses, together with four pairs of straw pillows. The trousseau had engaged the diligent labour of twelve tailors, who came every morning and worked at the house almost incessantly for seven months under Madame Wu's supervision. The garments made were mostly of silk and satin and they filled sixteen big bright red lacquered leather boxes. She also ordered a complete set of furniture for the middle chamber and two bedrooms. This was all of ebony inlaid with mother-o'-pearl and came from Shanghai. This again was selected according to her taste, and it was known that her judgment was always unquestionable. However, the bridal bed was excluded, for that alone, according to the custom of the place, had to be supplied by the groom's family. It was, in most cases, an heirloom handed down by his ancestors, and they always hoped that it would bring many more generations of their family into the world.

Three days prior to the wedding, the formal betrothal ceremony was celebrated by an exchange of presents. The Li Family sent the jewels—eight articles of gold and eight articles of jade, five hundred catties of wedding cakes—they were small round pieces, four pieces to a catty, and a hundred catties of sugar and an equal quantity of tea, both in small boxes. Except the jewels, these were for the Wu family to distribute to their friends and relatives. There were also chickens and ducks and geese, with pure

white feathers dyed red, four pairs of pigs and four pairs of goats. On the next day the Wu family sent the furniture, the plate and the trousseau to the new building and the long procession consisted of forty-eight open boxes carried by ninety-six men. It was only a few doors from one house to the other, but Madame Wu ordered the big procession to take a long circular route so that the whole town could have a look and admire the splendour.

On the preceding day the bride-to-be had to bid farewell to the family. Though it was a happy event, the atmosphere was, as is customary with the home that is going to be bereft of a daughter, solemn and sad. Two women were engaged to undo Lotus Fragrance's long plait of hair and then re-dress it into a big oval bunch at the back of her head. It was then and only then that some tiny superfluous hairs were removed and they made her up into an exquisitely beautiful little woman. Her eyebrows were carefully shaped and her lips were profusely rouged Powder and rouge were applied on her face and neck and she was perfumed by incense of musk and water-lily.

When she was all dressed up in her pre-bridal robes, the two women led her to kow-tow to the Ancestral Tablets in the Middle Chamber. During this ceremony, a small orchestra was playing and Lotus Fragrance could sob aloud without being heard. She then had to bid farewell to her grandmother by kow-towing and then do the same to her father and mother. Her mother was by now practically "a woman made of tears" and she hugged her daughter and would not let her leave her. This would be quite the usual occurrence when neither the mother nor the daughter knew what kind of a husband the unfortunate girl was to have. But as Madame Wu thought the young cousin was of a very good family, clever and rich, she considered her daughter-in-law was doing this a little excessively

The bride-to-be had now to preside over a feast and it was with great difficulty that they separated the girl from her mother. Over the feast, in which Lotus Fragrance was seated at the head table with four little girls—two on each side of a square table—she did not touch any food or drink and continued to sob silently. As a rule, the four girls would try their best to induce the bride-to-be to eat something when she would just stand up to acknowledge the courtesy, but refuse the food, which would begin to pile up in her bowl. Then the guests would come in to give her toasts, and again she would refuse them all. In China, when a toast is given, the person who receives it has to drink it, but because of modesty he can refuse it, so Lotus Fragrance's refusal of the toasts was quite in order.

When the guests were gone, Madame Wu ordered a very good and solid meal to be brought to Lotus Fragrance, who again refused to touch it. The old lady was, indeed, somewhat alarmed, and upbraided the girl for being headstrong. She said she quite understood that a girl of good family would not touch food and drinks when hundreds of pairs of eyes were concentrated on her, but now that she was alone with her grandmother, why, she surely had no cause to be shy! She added that a girl, sooner or later, had to marry, and as the ordeal occurred but once in a respectable woman's life, she must anticipate it with some intrepidity.

In the bride's home that was the busiest day. For on the day of the wedding there was not much to be done but to hand over the daughter to the other family, which would be the centre of this "affair of happiness". By nightfall Madame Wu felt she had had a very strenuous day. Though she had now passed her eighty-fourth year, she was still quite energetic. As she was so anxious to see to the union of her beloved grandchildren, she had kept a

suite of rooms with the Li Family, where she was to make her headquarters from the day of the wedding.

In ordinary cases the people of the bride's family do not show themselves in the other house on that important occasion. Except for the short period when the "sedan of happiness" comes for the bride, when her people have to get busy, all the members of her family usually pass a rather lonesome day. Since, however, Madame Wu was the maternal grandparent of the boy and her son was the brother of the groom's mother, it was decided that the elderly lady and her son were to be there on that day to direct the grand affair. As long as they did not appear in the chamber of ceremony when the wedding rite was going on they were doing nothing contrary to tradition.

In order to be able to go over to the Li Family very early in the morning, Madame Wu retired early that evening, and also forbade her son to stay up late. But when Mr. Wu saw the home was quiet, he, as usual, slipped away unobserved to visit his friends, with whom he generally stayed until late in the morning.

In the meantime the Li Family were having an even busier time at their newly built house. It was always a rush to decorate the bridal chamber, as the things from the bride's family came only one day before the great event. Since Madame Wu's things for her granddaughter were so delicate and so numerous, it required more hands and more care to arrange and display them properly. Shiao Ming's mother was as happy as happy could be, and our bridegroom was making his preparations with impatience.

He took, according to the rites, a special perfumed bath, and shaved, and plaited his queue with red silk tassels. All his old clothes were cast aside to be replaced by new ones, and he too was called upon to preside over a feast at the head table after he had paid respects to his

mother and to the Ancestral Tablet. This was, according to the rites, to inform his Ancestors that he was going to take a wife. There he sat in the seat of honour, with four younger boys, two at each side. But he, unlike the poor girl, ate and drank to his satisfaction

Early in the morning of the great day the empty bridal chair was taken into the Middle Chamber, where incense sticks and red candles were burning before the ancestral niche, with decorative lanterns hung overhead. Music started. Two ladies, specially invited for the purpose, paid respects to each other and, lighting two long tapers, began to look into every corner, and in fact everywhere round about the empty chair, so as to ensure there were no evil spirits hiding anywhere. This is a kind of miming performance, and every movement of the two taper holders has to be graceful and in accord with each other. Then, amidst music and fire-crackers, the bridegroom, riding on a horse, conducted the chair to the house of the bride, which, on the day of the wedding, had become a comparatively quiet place

He was received with loud and incessant reports of fire-crackers, but, in order to show the unwillingness of the family to part with its daughter, he was kept waiting outside the closed gate of the family for quite a long time. After his orchestra had played three different airs the gates were opened and the young man was ushered into the reception room, while the bridal chair was taken into the Middle Chamber, which was likewise decorated with red candles and lanterns.

Again the chair was inspected with tapers by two ladies here, and the unwilling bride refused to come out of the tightly closed doors of her boudoir until the orchestra had played three more tunes. Then, amidst fire-crackers, the mother opened the door and led out the bride, who was covered, according to tradition, with a big square of

red embroidered silk over her head, and was carried into the chair. It was immediately locked up with a tiny silver lock and sealed with two long pieces of red paper.

The orchestra went out first, and then the bridegroom, on his horse, led the bridal chair along. They took a long and different route to come to the new house. When the bridegroom went into the bridal room to wait, the chair was put into the Middle Chamber. The Master of Ceremonies, after having delivered his auspicious speech, ordered two young boys to request the presence of the lucky man. Though he should have been most anxious to come, he had to bow to the messengers and refuse to go out of his room once and again until they came to urge him for the third time. Then he went forth with the two boys and, following carefully the orders of the Master of Ceremonies, he broke the seal, unlocked the chair and led out the bride. At this juncture all the onlookers surged forward to have a first peep at the bride, though they knew that no part of her could be seen except her garments. As the bridal suit prepared by the Li Family was well known to have come from the best embroiderers of Soochou and had cost a fabulous sum of money, they felt that the discomfort they suffered was well worth while. They saw something which looked practically like a bundle of beautiful embroidered satin in various bright and dazzling colours. The bridal suit was long and loose, and the piece of embroidered red handkerchief covering her head was excessively large. It successfully prevented everyone from having even a glimpse of her chin or neck.

The bride remained completely covered during the whole of the ceremony, in which she kow-towed to Heaven and to the Ancestral Tablet, and then to her groom, who reciprocated. After this they drank the

"nuptial cups", which was done by mixing the wine from two cups, and they drank it by exchanging the cups once and again. Then the "united and harmonious knot" was tied and untied. This ceremony was performed by making a big self-untying knot on a piece of red silk, and the young couple straightened it by holding its two ends and giving it a pull. After these rites came the moment which everybody in the chamber was eagerly awaiting—the removing by the groom of the big handkerchief from the bride's head. All the guests surged forward once more. While everybody held his breath, Shiao Ming, with impatient hands, took away the piece of silk.

"Oh!" Shiao Ming gasped and looked in vain for his mother.

All the guests who had seen Lotus Fragrance before were utterly astonished. Standing before the bridegroom and dressed in her bridal robe and skirt was the pretty bondmaid, Little Rainbow. The Master of Ceremonies, who did not know the difference, went on with the remaining part of his duty. He chanted his four lines of auspicious poetry and declared that the bridegroom was to conduct his bride into the bridal chamber.

Unable to find his mother, Shiao Ming, the perfect gentleman, hesitated but a second when he observed the puzzled and anxious expressions of those present. He smiled ironically and started to lead the bride-substitute to the room. At the door of the bridal chamber he stopped. He had acted exactly in accordance with propriety, for, in ordinary cases, the bride was to be left in her room, where she would be helped to change her clothes, redress her hair and have a little rest before being led out to pay her respects to the members of her new family and the guests.

Leaving the bride, Shiao Ming dashed to Madame Wu. He found that his mother had just got there before him

and was sobbing bitterly and telling her elderly mother of the trick played on her and her son.

Madame Wu was furious, but suppressed her emotions marvellously. In calm tones she issued her orders.

"Don't weep, my daughter, and go back to the guests in the Middle Chamber immediately. Pretend that nothing is wrong, and proceed with everything as if the girl were Lotus Fragrance. If any guest who knows the difference asks you about it, say that Lotus Fragrance was suddenly taken ill, and that I had ordered the bondmaid to go through the ceremony in place of her young mistress. A formal ceremony will be performed as soon as Lotus Fragrance gets well. Whatever happens, we must save our face. Go and smile to your guests." She waved her daughter away and caught sight of the angry boy.

"You did well, Shiao Ming. Now you'll have to take Little Rainbow as your concubine. Continue with the ceremony while I and your father-in-law go home to find out what this nonsense is all about."

She sent her son to order the sedan chairs to be ready to take them over. Even at such an embarrassing moment she remained every inch a great lady. Her dignity prescribed that she must have her sedan chair to take her merely a few houses away.

But just at this time two important guests arrived. They were no other than Mr and Mrs Ma-Ke-Lao. Madame Wu nearly cursed the untimely arrival of these foreigners and had to order her son to remain behind to welcome the "barbarians" while she went off alone. Though rather embarrassed at the awkwardness of the situation, Mr. Wu had been looking forward to their visit. He conducted them to a reception room specially prepared for them. At the door Mr Ma turned back abruptly and said:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wu, you must have made a mistake!"

"No, Mr. Ma!" answered Mr. Wu. "This room was decorated by myself to welcome you!"

"There must be some mistake. I have just seen something which I ought not to have seen." Mr. Ma then whispered to his wife: "Look, Mary, look what is on the backs of the two big chairs facing the door." Without turning around, he pointed backwards to the room.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Ma, and for a moment was taken aback.

On the high backs of two chairs a pair of laced pink silk knickers and a corset were displayed in full view.

"Aren't they lovely, Mrs. Ma?" said the host with a smile.

Mrs. Ma tried to smile, but was too embarrassed to do so. She went forward as she said:

"Yes! But I suppose they are the bride's new under-clothes which were mislaid. Let me take them to her."

Mr. Ma kept his gaze respectfully fixed heavenwards.

"Oh no, Mrs. Ma. They are not hers. I ordered them from Shanghai specially for you," said Mr. Wu.

"For you, Mary!" exclaimed Mr. Ma. "What do you mean?" He looked challengingly at his wife instead of at the offender.

"I don't know what on earth he means!" exclaimed his wife in some amazement.

The innocent host was even more surprised than his guests.

"Why, I thought you liked these things! When we went to your house, you displayed a lady's skirt, and a pair of lady's trousers in the same way to honour us, and now that I have taken special pains to get even more expensive things to please you, you won't look at them. Is that fair?"

"Then this is a rebuke? But there was no cause for you to insult a clergyman and his wife . . ."

"No, indeed, it was far from my intention to insult you. Were you trying to insult me when you displayed the skirt and trousers?"

"Come, Mary, let us leave this madman," said Mr. Ma, suppressing his rage as best he could. He tried to drag his wife away.

"Steady, John," whispered his wife. "I don't think he was intentionally rude. I'll make him apologise . . ."

"No, Mary. You are extremely foolish to allow him to mollify you. You told him he was charming, and now you see how he is presuming to return your compliment."

"Let us congratulate the happy mother-in-law and the lucky young couple, John, and then go away without stopping for the feast," pleaded Mrs. Ma.

"No, Mary." Mr. Ma refused to compromise.

By this time the acting bride had had her rest, and was undergoing that important part of the rite of paying her first respects, standing and kneeling side by side with her groom, to the members, relatives and guests of her new family. Chairs had been placed in the centre of the Middle Chamber, and Shiao Ming's mother was made to sit down and to be the first honoured. Li Kang's wife was the next to take the honoured seat, and one by one all those present were made to receive the respects of the newly married pair.

This was a tiresome business, but the young couple's labours were not unrewarded. For each one who was honoured had to give them a little tip for pocket-money. Rich people gave as much as ten taels and very few gave less than two taels of silver. In a poorer family they would use only pieces of cash, and then the smallest sum would come down as low as a hundred pieces of cash, which only worked out at a little more than a tenth

of a tael of silver. A guest generally volunteered to act as the honorary treasurer, and he received and recorded the tips in a book made of red paper. After this important procedure of respect-paying the guests would congratulate, not the bridegroom or the bride, but the new mother-in-law.

Any guest going away before respects had been paid to him would be condemned as being unwilling to open his purse. As Mr. and Mrs Ma had been to other Chinese weddings before, they knew it scarcely looked well for them to go away at this juncture. Therefore when they heard that the young couple were at that moment paying respects to the guests, Mr. Ma stopped saying that they must go away, and Mrs. Ma tried her best to smile and placate.

"I'm sure you did not mean to insult us. It was simply a mistake. To show we have no ill-feelings we'll go to the Middle Chamber and offer our sincere congratulations to you all."

"But . . . but . . ." Mr Wu was afraid of bringing them to see the bride ". . . they are still paying their respects to the guests . . ." Instinctively he was barring their way.

"Why? Are we not good enough to receive their respects?" Mr Ma was on the offensive again.

"Of course you are. I only thought you wouldn't care . . ."

"Why not?" Mr. Ma took out his purse "We know the custom and we have prepared for it."

Mr. Wu did not know that Mr Ma was a Scot, and could not appreciate what his guest might do. However, he was obliged to lead them to the Middle Chamber, and they were immediately ushered to take their seats in the chairs provided for this special ceremony.

When they looked at the bride they were astonished

to see, instead of Lotus Fragrance, somebody else in her place. While receiving the salutations uneasily, Mr. Ma got up, signalled to his host and asked him for an explanation.

Mr. Wu hurried forward and whispered:

"It is all right, Mr. Ma. This is our bondmaid, Little Rainbow, acting on behalf of her young mistress. My humble daughter, Lotus Fragrance, was suddenly taken ill."

"But, man alive, a girl acting on behalf of another in the capacity of a bride! You are mocking me!" Mr. Ma felt this was too much.

"It's all right, Mr. Ma," his host tried to assure him once more "We are giving Little Rainbow to Shiao Ming as his concubine. Everything is in perfect order."

This was the last straw.

"Mary, let us leave this mad house this very instant. Never again will I go near any heathen wedding!"

He grabbed back from the honorary treasurer's hand the red envelope with the money in it intended for the tip to the bride and groom, and dragged his wife from her chair. Before anything possible could be done, they had left the house amidst audible whispers from the bewildered crowd.

Mr. Wu was not much surprised at their departure. He knew that foreigners could not appreciate the advantages of the concubine system, but he had never realised that to try to make a clergyman sanction such a union was too much. Neither could he understand why, among foreigners, the exhibition of Chinese lady's "unmentionable" garments was highly regarded, while the exposure of foreign ladies' lingerie was held to be unendurable.

To return to Madame Wu, she had repaired to her own house, and found that neither her daughter-in-law nor

her grandchild was there. The servants said they had not suspected Lotus Fragrance was missing, but that when Lotus Fragrance's mother had gone out in her sedan shortly after the bridal chair had taken its departure, they noticed that the bondmaid, Little Rainbow, was nowhere to be found.

Madame Wu received the shock with almost unbelievable calmness. She said that she even felt somewhat reassured on learning that her daughter-in-law had gone out in the proper way by riding in her sedan chair. She went into their rooms to investigate and found that her daughter-in-law had left all her things intact, while Lotus Fragrance had scarcely taken any clothing with her.

Soon the chair carriers came back, and Madame Wu immediately demanded of them where they had taken their young mistress.

"The Young Mistress said she wanted to burn incense in the Nunnery of Sedate Intelligence outside the Gate of Worthy Entrance. We took her there and were told that we should not wait but go home," the first carrier reported, full of misgivings.

Madame Wu was silent for a second and then said with a sob in her voice:

"How dutiful is my daughter-in-law! Because of the wedding, I've forgotten that to-day is the twentieth anniversary of the death of my husband. Prepare incense and candles and paper money, I'm going to the Nunnery of Sedate Intelligence to join my daughter-in-law in the service held for my poor deceased husband."

She immediately ordered sedan chairs to be got ready. As soon as the things to be used for the sacrifice were brought to her, she went into her chair and started for the South City Gate, followed by a maid in another chair.

The Buddhist Nunnery of Sedate Intelligence was situated on a piece of well-chosen high ground surrounded

by a bamboo grove, about four li from the city. In its forecourt there were several ancient pine trees, tall and majestic. Coming out of the thickly populated suburban part of Nanchang one could see the place a long distance away as a patch of dark green. On nearer approach, the lofty building of the Ming Dynasty architecture gradually appeared among the trees. It could be seen that the place had always been kept in excellent repair. The hundreds of years it had passed through had only given it a look of antiquity and reverence, which no modern building, however magnificent, could ever hope to emulate.

Madame Wu was in no mood to appreciate the nunnery's beauty. She told the chair bearers to pass through the forecourt and go straight into the main hall. The maid alighted first, and the nuns who were appointed to reception duty hurried forward to welcome her. She waved them aside, saying who she was and that she only wanted to see the Mother Superior on urgent business. On hearing this one of the reception nuns ushered her into a special drawing-room, while another went to inform the Mother Superior.

"Amitabha!" A very old nun, the hair on whose head had been entirely shaved off, came into the room leaning on the shoulder of a young girl. She was dressed in a grey robe which was so loose that when she sailed gracefully forward, it created an atmosphere as if she was soaring slowly among clouds. She made a deep bow to Madame Wu as she called the holy name of the Buddha. "This humble nun pays her respects to the honourable patroness. Please take a seat."

"My old self returns the respects to the great Mother Superior." Madame Wu never forsook her good manners. "Reports have just reached me that my humble and ignorant daughter-in-law has come here . . ."

"Yes, she is here, Amitabha. But the honourable patroness must please pardon this humble nun . . ." the Mother Superior hesitated for a second, looking at Madame Wu in a rather embarrassed manner.

"I'm sorry that the great Mother Superior should be bothered about the trifles of my humble family. My ignorant daughter-in-law must have had a lover's quarrel with my good-for-nothing son, and in a fit of childish temper she has come to your excellent Nunnery. Will you kindly send her out to me so that I may take her home? They have reached middle age, yet they are behaving like children. They must come to their senses immediately."

The Mother Superior, with a pathetic smile, took out from her big sleeve an envelope and presented it to Madame Wu with both hands.

"I'm afraid it has gone much farther than that, honourable patroness. Your excellent daughter-in-law has just cut off her 'three thousand pieces of threads of trouble' and entered the 'Doors of Emptiness', doing me the great honour of becoming my disciple. Here is her hair, which she asked me to return to you. 'Bone, flesh, skin and hair belong to your parents', says the sage, 'and you must not damage them at random.' Her parents are dead, Amitabha and so she wants you, her mother-in-law, to take it with you."

"Oh, no!" Madame Wu began to lose her self control "Where is she? I . . . I must . . . take . . . her home . . . I must! A little quarrel . . ."

"It is too late now, honourable patroness. She told me there was no quarrel, that she had married off her daughter to someone you disliked and that she would meet you and ask for your forgiveness only by the Yellow Springs of the Great Other World, Amitabha."

To Madame Wu the quiet but firm words of the Mother

Superior sounded louder and more crushing than thunder claps, and the ever self-possessed lady felt that Heaven was crumbling and the earth was quaking. Stars danced before her eyes and her head went whirling round and round in ever quickening pace. Her maid, seeing that her elderly mistress looked strange, rushed forward, but was only in time to catch her when she collapsed.

The Mother Superior ordered the nuns to lay Madame Wu on a couch and immediately sent for a doctor. Madame Wu revived slowly, by the time the doctor arrived she was well enough to insist upon being taken home immediately. The doctor could not dissuade her and she was carried home in her chair. During all this time, the Mother Superior never allowed anybody to inform the daughter-in-law about Madame Wu's presence. When a woman has "left her home and escaped into the Doors of Emptiness" she is considered as not belonging any more to this world, which is full of troubles.

*"Never keep a person of seventy to stay for a meal,
And never keep a person of eighty to stay for tea."*

This proverb shows the importance of a person dying at home. Madame Wu, being well over eighty-four, knew her end was at hand after receiving this blow. In all her life she had always had her own way in everything. Not only was the shattering of her greatest wish, which she had been nursing for seventeen long years, fatal to her, but also her loss of face, which she had done her best to keep, was more than she could bear.

She reached her home at nightfall. All the guests were gone, seeing that something was utterly wrong. Her son and daughter and Shiao Ming hurried to her side, and the maid told them what she had heard and seen. Madame Wu only asked them faintly:

"Has . . . that . . . fisherman's . . . bastard . . . been here . . . at all?"

"No," they replied.

There was no need to go further with the investigation. Everybody knew perfectly well what must have happened. Li Ming's wish had after all been fulfilled.

Madame Wu passed away the next day. No matter what they did to her, her eyes remained wide open.

The Wedding of the Li Family was followed by the Funeral of the Wu Family. It is a great pity that one cannot possibly take charge of one's own funeral, otherwise Madame Wu's funeral, from being the least important function of her life, would have been the greatest show the city of Nanchang had ever seen.

With his mother dead and his wife gone, Mr. Wu found that, lonely though he ought to be, there was a feeling of relief which he had never experienced before. To avoid being the subject of gossip to the whole city, he decided to break up his home in Nanchang and to live in Shanghai, where he had many friends. Shiao Ming, hearing of this plan of his father-in-law—for he still regarded him as his father-in-law—made plans to join the gay old man. Because of the recent happenings in his home and those in the Wu family, he had been obliged to hide himself from his friends and relatives in order to escape embarrassment. He visited all the sing-song girls' houses in this small provincial capital and, being a young man of very refined taste, found none of these places worthy of a second, or, to judge by its best, a third visit from him. As he had no face to show himself in the missionary school, he thought it as well to keep his father-in-law company, and also to forget his remorse, by making a trip to Shanghai.

Because of the wedding and the funeral, and their subsequent nocturnal visits, they had been seeing each other very often and had come to know each other quite

intimately. Besides, they both regarded themselves as highly sentimental, especially where women were concerned. Since each had lost a wife, they felt they were now bound together much closer than before. They had so much in common.

When Ta Tung had received the hundred taels from Shiao Ming, who had advised him to leave for Peking as soon as possible because communications would be bad towards the end of the year, he was still quite undecided what to do. The spiritual guidance which he had sought from Mr. Ma had been very crushing, and he shuddered to think of the remarks of Mrs. Ma. With so much money in his hands for the first time, he felt as if he were a millionaire. He remembered that the great-aunt had refused to accept the repayment of her money from Li Kang because she knew it came from selling his ricefields. As the debt had been outstanding since then, because Li Kang's salary was little more than enough to feed the family, Ta Tung now saw where a small part of his silver should go.

He went to the village, and his aunt was very pleased to see him again. She thought he had come to spend the New Year holiday at home. At an early opportunity Ta Tung cornered the great-aunt in her room and presented her with thirty taels of silver. Of course she demanded to know where it came from, and Ta Tung unfolded everything to her. The great-aunt laughed ironically.

"Ha! It's your own money now used to bribe you to keep your hands off Lotus Fragrance, who is really your betrothed. Li Ming's wife had hinted to many of us that as Lotus Fragrance had a very peculiar nativity, it was you to whom the girl was actually engaged, and it was Li Ming's scheme to humour the old lady while she was alive, but to marry the girl to you when she died.

Who would have thought that Li Ming would die before his mother-in-law! Now that Li Ming is gone, his widow has evidently changed her mind. At any rate she is no match for her mother. I don't want to be bothered about these two families. Rich houses in the city are always in a mess. Neither do I care for the girl. She is too pretty, and I still don't believe that prodigal son of the Wu family is capable of having a child. Lotus Fragrance doesn't look in the least like her father!"

"But she is a replica of her mother . . ."

"That may be so. Though I've never seen the mother, I have heard a lot about her from Li Ming and others. Like mother, like daughter. I wouldn't trust either of them. If you want my advice, don't go near them at all. A pretty woman can always get round men and make them sacrifice their lives and careers for the slightest of her whims."

"I'm firm, and nobody could induce me to lift a finger against my will. But she seemed to be in great trouble and wanted me to take her away from Shiao Ming. Should I not help her in her dire distress?"

"Dire distress be blowed! There is no right and wrong in this world. You must think of yourself first. They were wrong to deprive you of your rightful betrothal, but it will be a good riddance. Mind you, I don't believe in the least about her dreadful nativity. I have the best 'eight characters' a woman can possibly have, and here I am, without a single piece of cash or a descendant to my name! But you'll be her slave all your life if you don't be very careful to avoid her. From the little I saw of her I know what kind of a girl she is. Don't think you are firm. You'll be doomed if you don't keep away from such women."

Ta Tung did not argue with her about this. He knew he had nothing to fear. But when the old woman refused the money, Ta Tung was firm. He just put the notes down

and went away, not caring whatever the great-aunt said.

Ta Tung followed her advice and did his best to keep away from Lotus Fragrance. But it is said that:

*"While men can make ships approach the shore,
Women can make the shore approach ships"*

Ta Tung was certainly much less firm than the shore, and he soon found himself approaching her willingly. Once they had had a discussion together there was no need to ask about the result. When Ta Tung went to the country to bid farewell to his aunt, Ta Yu, and lastly the great-aunt, she cornered him in a quiet place and said in a gruff voice.

"You spineless boy! When are you going to elope with that dreadful girl?"

Ta Tung blushed and would neither deny nor confirm her accusation.

"No use to keep it from me! Your uncle once told me the story of a philosopher and his seagulls. You look exactly like the philosopher!"

Ta Tung knew the story and could not help laughing at himself. The philosopher was a lover of seagulls. The birds would perch on the palm of his hand to pick food from it, whereas they would fly away long before anybody else could get near them. His elderly father, who never went out of his home, would not believe it, and ordered him to catch one to prove it. As it would not do to disobey his father, the man went to the seaside to catch a bird. But this time all the birds flew away when they saw him approaching.

"I had to consent to take her away from Shiao Ming. There is something which you don't know . . ."

"All right I don't want any excuses I should have known that she would make you put the harness around

your neck willingly. Here is a jacket which I have made for you. It is padded with raw silk puffs, specially suited for the cold weather in the North. As I sewed it with my own hands, promise me never to part with it."

"I promise." Ta Tung received the jacket with thanks.

"And if you begin to feel that it seems to give less warmth than before, you must open the seams, take out the tissue paper, substitute new paper and remake the silk puffs. I suppose Lotus Fragrance is a good needle-woman. Don't trust the silk puffs to anybody else."

"She is deft with needle, scissors and foot-measure."

"Don't praise her before me I can't bear it. How do you go, and have you completed your arrangements?"

"No, not quite. We thought of hiring a boat first . . ."

"It's high time you did so, young man. There are only a few days left."

"It is all rather risky. I am afraid the secret may leak out."

"Leave it to me Where do you go first?"

"Kiu-kiang."

"That's easy A boat shall wait for you here at The Bridge of Heaven, if you think to start near the city is too dangerous"

"Great-aunt, thank you very much . . ."

"Get away, young man. Get away before I lose my temper."

Arrangements were secretly made, and on the night previous to the wedding Ta Tung was to take Lotus Fragrance away. Since everybody would retire early, matters should be rather simple. Long before midnight all the people in the house were in bed and fast asleep—except Lotus Fragrance and her mother. Bidding good-bye to her mother amid heart-breaking sobs, the girl went away with Ta Tung, who had a wheelbarrow pushed by a hired stranger waiting for her just round the corner of

the house. They had to go out of the city by the West Gate, because it was the only gate not closed at that time of night. When they arrived at the village, the great-aunt joined her on the other side of the barrow and they were wheeled to the boat.

On board the junk red candles and incense sticks were burning, and the great-aunt acted as the Master of Ceremonies and the go-between; and also on behalf of the parents of both parties, to sanction the marriage. After seeing that they had drunk the "nuptial cups" and tied and untied the "united and harmonious knot", she bade them farewell.

"Fair wind, good luck and happiness to you. Treat her well, Ta Tung, although she doesn't deserve it I want to curse you for keeping an old woman out of her bed at this time of the night, but I have to give you my blessings. Write to your uncle as soon as you arrive at your destination, and I'll tell your aunt everything. I shudder to think what she will say."

By daybreak, when the Li Family was beginning to be busy about the wedding, the real bride had already sailed away from Nanchang

CHAPTER IX

*"Eating plain food, drinking water, and bending my arm for pillow,
I can still find happiness in such surroundings.
Wealth and honour acquired not by the right way
Are as void to me as floating clouds"*

IN the south, the weather in winter is not very cold. A voyage along one of the tributaries of the mighty Yangtze at this time of the year can be very pleasant. Ta Tung's

boat was a small one, it had to keep quite near the bank of the river. Though they were going downstream, they were sailing northwards and met with mainly head-winds. The pace of the boat was fairly slow. This certainly had the disadvantage of not getting them to their destination as early as they would have liked, but there was the advantage of their having a very good view of the scenery of the countryside. Spring begins much earlier south of the Yangtze than north of it. Deep red buds of the plum blossoms were seen on the trees all along the way. Farm-houses, small and snug-looking, with thatched roofs and mud walls, were gathered in groups of threes and fours among the pines and cedars, which remained green while the other trees were bare. The ricefields, with nothing in them, looked deserted. No water-mills were working. Occasionally a few water buffalo could be seen straying in the fields leisurely, and sometimes casting a disdainful glance at the busy passers-by. A cowherd boy, if he was to be seen, would be following his herd at a long distance, playing tunes of his own composition on his simple bamboo pipe. Everywhere was a picture of contentment, happiness and leisure.

When they came to pass through the notorious Po-Yang Lake, in which it is said that "the waves are at least three feet high when there is no wind", they found they were fairly good sailors and could bear the slight sway of the boat without discomfort. There they seemed to be lost in a vast world of nothing but water and air. In the distance the horizon was scarcely distinguishable. The lower part of the sky looked as if it melted into the water. Sails of every size, new and old, patched and ragged, passed them by in rapid succession. Soon the Lu Mountain, whose real face is known to no mortals, seemed to regard the eloping couple with a hidden smile of indifference. Four days after this they arrived at Hu-Kow or "the

Mouth of the Lake", and they could see in the water the natural boundary line which marked the end of the Kan River and the sphere of the Yangtze.

From a distance, the difference seemed to be clear-cut. The water of the Kan is green and that of the Yangtze is pale brown. They meet but do not mix at all. When the boat came to sail over the very meeting place, the waters could still be distinguished, as if some immortal hand had chalked a straight line over the surface and the elements had to abide by it.

They did not tarry in the small port of Kiu-kiang at all. Changing into a much bigger boat, they sailed down the great Yangtze for Shanghai. The weather happened to be bad, and during these last few days of the year boats were very few and passengers, delayed on business and in a hurry to join their families for the New Year festivals, overcrowded every boat that was sailing. This made the young lovers decide not to go to Shanghai but to change into a smaller boat once more, and to sail northwards inland by the Grand Canal.

At Ching-kiang, where the Yangtze and the Canal cross each other, they hired a small junk bound for North Tungchow. This change proved to be very successful. As they proceeded slowly northwards the climate became milder and milder and everything on both banks of the narrow Canal began to show signs of life and to look beautiful. Early spring bird-songs, the barking of dogs and the crowing of cocks could be heard from the houses along the banks. Being the sole passengers of the boat, they were treated by the boatman and his wife as if they were part of the family. The water was still shallow and very often the boatman had to go ashore to tow the boat from the towpath on the bank with a long rope, while his wife stayed behind to look after the helm. As the boat sailed—if it could be called sailing—

slowly along the canal, the young couple practically had the whole of it to themselves and time went by very quickly. When they reached the Yellow River in the western part of the Province of Shantung, it was already in the latter half of the second moon of the New Year (1898).

The temperature in the North is very different from that in the South. Soon frost and snow became frequent visitors, and the Canal began to be unnavigable on account of the ice or because the water was not deep enough. They had to abandon the boat and join a party of merchants who were going northwards and travelling with beasts of burden. Women in the North are quite accustomed to riding on horses, mules and donkeys, and Lotus Fragrance, following their example, would not consent to make the rest of the journey shut up in a mule cart. Ta Tung had to hire two horses, and she found riding very fascinating.

Travelling on horseback, they could not possibly avoid being exposed to wind and dust, but they made very quick progress, and in two days had already arrived at the border between Shantung and the Metropolitan Province, and were only some 500 li from the capital. If the weather kept fine, they hoped to reach their final destination in four or five days. Attempting to gain a little more time, they passed the usual resting station and at dusk were still on the road some distance from the next small town. Suddenly the sound of the loud and rapid ringing of the bells of galloping horses was heard approaching them very quickly. One of the travellers, an old man, shouted to the company in alarm:

“Quick, hide your money and valuables. The highwaymen!”

The sound of the bells came louder and nearer. Some of the travellers got down from their horses and opened their packs and bundles, but were unable to find a safe

place in which to hide their money and valuables Ta Tung took out his money in a great hurry and slipped it into his socks, while Lotus Fragrance picked out a pair of gold bracelets and tried to think of a better treasury

The robbers appeared before them suddenly, as if they had dropped down from Heaven There were more than a dozen of them. They were hefty and swarthy Northerners, all armed to the teeth There was no struggle—for it would have been useless—and all the luggage and boxes were quickly and efficiently searched They pocketed whatever was valuable and easy to carry, and then began to search the persons of their victims. They found money or jewels on everybody, and Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance made the biggest contribution. When the robbers were satisfied with their booty, they whistled, rode away and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

When the sound of the bells had died away the victims began to collect their things and see what they had lost Practically all the valuables and money were gone and they asked each other what was to be done It seemed to Ta Tung that they all bore their misfortune on rather broad shoulders Nobody hinted at reporting the robbery to the authorities. They knew only too well that, the place being on the border of two provinces, the authorities of Shantung would tell them to go and report at a Metropolitan Province Yamen, while the authorities of that province would tell them to go and report at a Shantung Province Yamen. Some even remarked that they were quite prepared for this None of them carried much money or jewels with them. What little had been taken was jovially termed "life-saving funds", which, they said, a traveller must carry with him and be prepared to offer to the robbers, or the robbers would be roused to hurt or even to kill him

Most of these travellers said that they had business connections at Ho-Kian-Fu, the next big city. Some said that they would have to stay at the next inn to write for more money. A few said that their baggage was when pawned just enough to raise the necessary expenses of the rest of the journey. But Ta Tung realised that none of these solutions could be applied to him and his wife. They had nobody in the next or any town on the way. They could not write to anybody for money. As for their baggage, they had practically none. It could be readily understood that Ta Tung, afraid of being suspected by the school authorities, had taken nothing but a small parcel of bare daily necessities with him, and Lotus Fragrance had an even better reason for travelling with less than light baggage.

Ta Tung was really at his wit's end. He went to Lotus Fragrance with a sinking heart and said-

"What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Did they take all the money?" said the girl.

"Everything on me has gone. They took off my shoes and my socks . . ."

"What bad manners they had!" said Lotus Fragrance. "All the jewels are gone, too. They were more polite to me and did not touch me, but I had to hand over everything I had on me. Let us go, Ta Tung. There is no use crying over a broken vase. Help me to mount my horse."

"How can we manage to go any further?" sighed Ta Tung, as he helped her up

"But I think we must manage it somehow or other . . ."

"I don't see how we can. They took all our money . . ."

"No, not our money, Ta Tung. It was Shiao Ming's money, and I am glad you left thirty taels for the great-aunt. You must realise that it was given to you on the understood condition that you should leave me alone so that I must marry him. Now that you have not stuck to

the bargain, it was only right the robbers should take the money."

"This is no time for joking," Ta Tung exclaimed despairingly. "And all the jewels, too . . ."

"Yes, that is a great pity! Some of them were my mother's, which I wanted so much to keep always with me. But the rest were engagement presents from the Li family. They should belong to Shiao Ming's bride, Little Rainbow. We actually had no right to them. They merely passed from the hands of one robber to another—except one little piece, a tiny golden bracelet, which must be borrowed to see us to Peking. What's to be done after that, I don't know."

"Must be borrowed? What do you mean?" Ta Tung was full of expectation.

"Search in the pool of mud and ordure from the horse I think you will find something which I dropped there by accident. I'm afraid you'll soil your hands, so don't dare to touch me afterwards!"

A naughty smile appeared on her face as she began to follow the rest on the way.

In the pool of mud she indicated, Ta Tung found the treasure. It wasn't much, but it was evidently quite enough to see them through to the capital. For the moment Ta Tung was so overjoyed at this discovery that he entirely forgot that, with everything else gone, they would probably have to face starvation very soon.

The little bracelet was sold to a jeweller at the next town, which was a very small one. Either the man was not quite honest or else he must never have dealt with gold bracelets before. For the price he agreed to pay was extraordinarily small. Ta Tung had to take what was offered as there was no one else to go to.

In five days they arrived at Peking. It was late in the afternoon in the end of the 2nd moon. The dying rays of the spring sun made the roofs in the distance look as if they were made of gold. It was a bitterly cold but beautifully dry day, and the city could justifiably be called the "City of Dust", being actually ankle deep in many side streets. The Palaces, temples and other big buildings and mansions were majestic and impressive, and the streets were very busy. Once more they seemed to forget about their poverty at the sight of the beauty and splendour. As their horses trotted towards the lofty and massive tower of the city gates, their hearts went pit-a-pat. A strange sensation seemed to come over them. They felt as if they had come to Paradise.

But Peking is a Paradise with many obscure and dark corners. The little inn at which the young couple chose to stay was one of such corners. On their entrance into the city, they paused for a second and turned back their heads to have a further look at the gigantic structure of the city tower underneath which they had just passed. Suddenly they were surrounded by a host of inn agents, who struggled with each other to get to them and ask for a hearing. It was impossible for Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance to hear anything when all of them were shouting at the top of their voices and at the same time waving a piece of red paper violently before Ta Tung's face. Ta Tung took the piece of paper from one of them, and the rest at once dispersed. Everything immediately became peaceful again.

The inn agent whose paper Ta Tung had taken told his new customers that he could accommodate them at a number of excellent hotels, the names of which were printed on the paper. Ta Tung glanced over it, and found that the descriptions and prices of any of these hotels were far from suitable to his modest purse. Blushing a

little, he asked the man for decent places at moderate charges, and the man laughed as if to say that these two things seldom went together. However, he led them to a quiet little inn in a narrow back street. Enquiring the charge, Ta Tung was thankful to know that his complete fortune was a little more than enough to bring them comfort for the night. He tipped the agent as much as he could within the budget for the day.

It was more than two months since Lotus Fragrance had had a really comfortable place to rest in, and their little room in the hotel, though bare and chilly, was a great relief to the tired girl. They did their best to make themselves at home, and when their first meal in Peking, a simple but palatable one, was served they thoroughly enjoyed it. The servant, who acted in the capacity of waiter, porter and chambermaid, seeing they were not going out in the evening, asked them if they would like to have a fire, as the night was bitterly cold with a piercing north wind. However much Ta Tung would have liked to have one for his young bride, he knew that he had not the means for the extra charge, and he had to say 'no'. When they retired for the night, much earlier than usual, they thought that most probably sleep would overtake them before their heads touched the pillows. They were greatly fatigued by their continuous and strenuous journey and needed a rest badly. In their bed, they found the cotton quilt to be stiff and chilly. Even when Lotus Fragrance's fur coat was put on top of it, it was still not warm enough. Unfortunately Ta Tung had no fur coat, and his silk padded coat was no help at all. They were actually shivering with cold though they kept close together. Their feet became more and more stiff, until at last they felt as if they had no feet at all.

Unable to go to sleep, Ta Tung had to get up, and he ordered some boiling hot water, which was supplied free

of charge and was available during all the hours of the day and the night. They dipped their feet into a basin full of this and felt them gradually coming to life again. But the hot water soon became cold. They could not go on ordering it at frequent intervals, so they had hardly any comfort and very little rest on their first night in this very rich city.

Tossing in his bed, Ta Tung planned out the things he must do on the following day. Very early in the morning they had their modest breakfast without exchanging more than a dozen words. Ta Tung told his wife that he had to go out to call on some friends with whom he had corresponded for a long time. As he was short-sighted and very bad at finding his way, he spent the whole day out. He came back by nightfall. On entering the room, he found the place had a different atmosphere. It was now tidy, warm and cosy. An open "coal-ball" stove was in the middle of the room, and Lotus Fragrance, in a homely puffy cotton-padded coat, rose from the chair by the fire to welcome him.

"You look tired, Ta Tung. Come and sit by the fire And don't stare at me as if you had never seen me before. Have you had any meal yet?"

"No. But I don't mind that . . ."

"You must be starving. I'll see that you have something to eat immediately."

Had she been looking more carefully at him instead of trying to avoid his eyes, she would have seen that fatigue, hunger and disappointment were all over his face. But she went to the door of the room and gave orders to the servant for a quick meal to be brought for her husband. In her voice Ta Tung was surprised to find that there was a little Mandarin accent, which was more than he could achieve.

"How did you manage to acquire the Peking accent in

a single day? You must have been talking incessantly since I left."

"Almost," she smiled. "You see, I had to do some shopping."

"Shopping?"

"Yes. Haven't you noticed my new cotton-padded coat?"

"But where did you get the money for it?"

"Well, I have a lot of things to tell you. About noon, the manager came to ask me whether we were staying on. He added that since we had paid for only one day we must either move out before twelve o'clock or pay for another day. If we had baggage with us, he remarked, he would not ask for payment in advance, but you know we have none. So I decided that I must get some money. Remembering that I had seen a pawnshop just round the corner when we were led here, I went there and pawned my fur coat. The pawnbroker pulled a long face at me. When I addressed him in twenty words, he answered me, in two. You never saw such rude men before. I thought he wouldn't give me much for the coat, but was greatly surprised to hear him offer twenty-five taels of silver. As I felt cold, I agreed to that immediately. Taking the money, I enquired from him where I could buy a cotton-padded coat. He merely replied 'The Bridge of Heaven'. Did you hear, Ta Tung, a Bridge of Heaven in Peking!"

"Yes. I was surprised too."

"But it is a dreadful place! And there are hundreds of second-hand dress shops there. The people in those shops are extremely hospitable and chatty. They offered me tea and free advice. They told me to buy this coat before I realised what I was doing. Now I see it doesn't quite suit me. Women in the north are much bigger than we are. But it's warm and comfortable. And since we have money to burn, I ordered the fire immediately. You

see I have had quite a lot of practice in speaking with the Peking accent to-day."

Ta Tung was speechless.

"Don't look at me like that and say nothing. Are you angry with me? We had to raise a little money by selling something, and I don't want to wear a fur coat while you have none."

"Angry with you? How could I be? I was only wondering why the people of The Bridge of Heaven were so hospitable to you while they were so rude to me!"

"Have you been there too?"

"Yes. The man in the pawnshop told me to go there."

"The man in the pawnshop? What have you to pawn?"

"The silk coat, of course. But he wouldn't look at it. And when I asked him where could I find a shop which would take it, he also answered briefly 'The Bridge of Heaven'."

"So that's why you went there! But you promised the great-aunt never to part with it!"

"I shall have to keep that promise now. The shopkeepers in The Bridge of Heaven had a very low opinion of this excellent garment. They were talkative, but their words were used entirely to discredit the remarkable workmanship of my dear great-aunt. I nearly quarrelled with some of them. I told them that they had no need to abuse the quality of the coat when they did not want to buy it. At last I found a shopkeeper who made the generous offer of eight thousand pieces of cash . . ."

"Eight thousand? Not bad! My coat only cost me three taels, which is only two thousand."

"I knew you would think as I did. So I gave him the coat, and how much do you think he really paid me?"

"No, did he go back on his offer?"

"He gave me eight hundred. I thought he had made a mistake, but he told me that the Manchurian system of

counting money was like that. Eight hundred pieces is termed as eight thousand. I had to take the coat back."

"Now I remember my mother once said that people in Peking were always *shuo-ta-hua, yung-shiao-chien*—'talking in big figures, spending in small money'. And this is what she meant."

"Talking in big figures, spending in small money' It's a very good policy for us." Ta Tung smiled philosophically.

He had visited a few friends who were connected with the reform movement, and had found that none of them was holding any position of importance. Not only was it impossible for him to recommend himself to them as a young man of ability and enthusiasm for the cause and willing to work hard, but also it was impossible for them to find any job for him even if he had had the courage to do so. The reform movement was still very much in the air. Though there was quite a big following among the young intellectuals, the ministers and other officials in power were conservative and not at all keen on reform. Some of Ta Tung's friends were hoping that the Englishman, Li Ti-Mo-Tai, would come to the capital as quickly as possible, because he had had several interviews with the most influential officials at court, and Wen Tung-Ho, the Prime Minister and Imperial Tutor, was quite taken by his frankness and zeal. It seemed that the Englishman's words would carry much weight with the authorities.

Ta Tung knew that his hope of entering the university was gone with his money, but he had hoped that he could find a small job connected with the reform movement. Now that he had seen all his friends, he realised that there was nothing for him to do but to wait for the arrival of his English uncle. The policy of 'talking in big figures and spending in small money' sounded good, but when

put into practice, candereens of silver and pieces of cash disappeared just as quickly as ever.

Lotus Fragrance knew how to economise. She was the first to propose the reduction of the dishes at their meals, to which Ta Tung agreed readily. When they were cut to a minimum of one plate (vegetables) and one bowl (soup) and plain rice between them, no further decrease was possible. Even as it was, this was scarcely enough to maintain their respectability in front of the servants of the hotel. As there was still no news of any development in the political situation, they decided that from now on, in order to cut down their daily expenses, they would not have meals at the hotel. This was quite a substantial saving, because they found out that by eating merely baked sweet potatoes or baked cakes, they could live on very little a day. A meal of potatoes cost about twenty pieces of cash, while one of cakes was slightly more.

They had to go out just before meals were served, saying they had been invited by some friends, and as they did not want to eat in the streets, they had to walk about for an hour or so until it looked as if they had finished their meal somewhere. Then they bought baked potatoes or cakes and brought them home carefully wrapped up, so as to defy detection. Within closed and securely bolted doors, they swallowed their food silently and hurriedly. It was difficult to eat such dry stuff quickly, and they dared not ask for water to make tea at such a time because it would look suspicious. They had to sip some cold tea which had been made before the meal or else wait for an hour or so before they thought it discreet to order hot water.

During their regular walks, which occurred twice or three times a day, Ta Tung discovered the street where the second-hand bookstalls were. They spent their hour before every meal there. There were some scores of them

Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance visited them in rotation. Occasionally when she noticed that the keeper of the stall was eyeing them with meaning, she would nudge Ta Tung to move on or else to spend a few pieces of cash in buying an utterly useless and cheap pamphlet.

For nearly two months they lived very economically in this hotel waiting for the reform movement leaders to come into power, and also for the arrival of Li Ti-Mo-Tai. They found there was a cheaper room in the hotel and they immediately moved into it. They saw some of the inmates of the place doing their own washing, and Lotus Fragrance began to wash some of the smaller articles of their clothing, socks and handkerchiefs. Later on she decided that she could wash all their underclothes. Ta Tung had been in the habit of going to the barber's once every fortnight. Now he had not been there for nearly a month. Tea-leaves cost quite a small sum of money, and they had given that up, drinking nothing except water. Lotus Fragrance no longer feared the enquiring glances of the bookstall keepers. She might hint to Ta Tung to move on if she found a man looked threatening, but she would never suggest that they should spend any money on pamphlets.

At the end of the fourth moon, an Imperial Edict was issued proclaiming a General Reform. It was a command to everybody in the Empire, from ministers, princes and dukes down to the common people, urging them to discard their old obsolete and inefficient ways and to adopt whatever was good and new. While all the followers of the reform movement were overjoyed at the news, Ta Tung was even happier than any of them, because he learned that his English uncle had come north to pay the reform leaders a secret visit. In the meantime the wildest rumours were in circulation in the capital, and perhaps

they were spread by the opponents of the reformers. It was said that an unprecedented step was going to be taken by the Government, the appointment of a new Prime Minister by the Young Emperor, and possible candidates for this post were thought to be either Marquis Ito, the Japanese reformer, Li Ti-Mo-Tai, the English missionary, or Kang Yu-Wei, the leader of the Reform Society.

Though it seemed madness to believe that China would have a Japanese nobleman or an English clergyman or a common man without any previous official rank as Prime Minister, the reform was regarded by many as a radical change scarcely short of craziness. Li Ti-Mo-Tai's sudden arrival in Peking made Ta Tung think that there was some truth in the rumour. As he was very anxious to meet his English uncle, it was immediately arranged that he should be received at the Grand Hotel des Wagon Lits on that very afternoon.

Lotus Fragrance was no less excited about the news than her husband. She brushed and cleaned Ta Tung's silk coat and borrowed a hot iron from the manager's wife to iron his handkerchiefs. She folded and put one of them into the pocket of his silk coat and told him over and over again that he must never look for waste paper to blow and wipe his nose. It was a fine day, and to celebrate the occasion they decided to go to a small and cheap restaurant, on which they had had an eye for a long time, to have a better luncheon. Knowing Ta Tung's habit of losing his way, she wanted him to start at half past three. She felt that the clock went much slower than usual. At three fifteen she urged him to go, saying it was a good policy to walk slower and start earlier. This would leave plenty of margin.

The Grand Hotel des Wagon Lits was a European establishment and the most expensive hotel in Peking. Situated near the east end of Tung Chiao Ming Hsian, or

the Legation Street, it was a place where Ta Tung had never been before but about which he had heard a great deal A deep and wide moat, almost a small river, was in front of this magnificent building The pavement along each side of this waterway was scattered with the petals of fallen flowers from the trees planted on the banks The wall of the Tartar City was on its immediate left, causing the road leading to it to come to a dead end. The neighbourhood resembled the quiet and picturesque corner of a park. Yet it was quite convenient for getting to the busy part of the city, as the place was actually in between Chien Men and Hata Men.

After pausing at the entrance to make sure it was the hotel, Ta Tung mounted the steps and entered this foreign building. It was entirely different from any big Chinese hotel he had ever seen There was no luggage or suitcases piled up in the lobby One could not see numbers of porters and stewards waiting for orders in the entrance hall. He went to the quiet reception counter and asked for Dr Timothy Richard.

Sitting on a big comfortable sofa in the lounge waiting for Li Ti-Mo-Tai, Ta Tung began to picture to himself what would soon happen He seemed to see that this famous missionary was totally different from Mr Ma-Ke-Lao of Nanchang in every respect, in appearance as well as in spirit He was sure that Li Ti-Mo-Tai was a man of the world instead of being a narrow-minded evangelist whose collar, costume, hands, eyes, voice, smiles and words all had only one meaning 'I came here to save the lost souls of all the Chinese heathens' He imagined that Li Ti-Mo-Tai's features would look benign instead of shrewd like those of Mr. Ma, that he would be more interested in trying to serve China and humanity than solely in pushing the interests of his particular mission. In the vision before him, he saw that

Li Ti-Mo-Tai was bringing enlightenment to the Emperor and his ministers, power to the reform leaders and real happiness to the Chinese people. As for himself, Ta Tung dreamed that he and Lotus Fragrance would no longer suffer insufficiency or inconvenience during their meals, that she would not need to do any more washing, that he could go to the barber's as often as he liked, and that he could get all the nice books he saw for his uncle, Li Kang.

While Ta Tung was day-dreaming in this way, Li Ti-Mo-Tai walked into the lounge. The boy saw a tall impressive Englishman, with grey hair and beard, approaching him with a big, kind and firm hand outstretched. The weight of his personality was so great that Ta Tung immediately felt that he was face to face with a very famous man. He was right; this Englishman looked kind and broadminded, and the peculiar twinkle in his eyes made everybody believe in and like him. He was wearing an ordinary European lounge suit, and not the clergyman's collar and dress for which Ta Tung had developed an unreasonable personal dislike. His voice was very cordial and reassuring. Ta Tung felt as if he were talking to his uncle, Li Kang.

"How happy I am to meet my nephew at last! By the grace of the Lord, I hope all is well with you."

He held Ta Tung's hand in a firm grip, and the boy felt warmth and sincerity in it. In a moment of such profound happiness, he could not hear those kind words, but the voice and the tone in which they were said were more than comforting. After a few preliminary exchanges of greetings, at which Ta Tung was not very good, he began to tell the Englishman of the eagerness with which all the reformers were waiting for his help and guidance.

"I am but one of the many who are willing to give whatever ability and energy we have to the cause. Without drastic reform, China will be ruined very soon. A

nation cannot stand in the present ever advancing world merely because of her past glories We must progress with the march of the times. The old officialdom and mandarinate are leading the country to her doom. Instead of trying to open the eyes of the masses, the Government still pursues its old policy of allowing the people to remain ignorant and choosing a few to govern them by the old obsolete methods of examination."

"You are perfectly right, my boy I have recently sent a memorial to the Throne, and the Prime Minister and Imperial Tutor seemed to be very pleased with it In the memorial I submitted the following things First, the establishment of a Board of Education to introduce modern schools and colleges throughout the Empire"

"That is exactly what I thought most important."

"Yes And second, the establishment of an intelligent Press, with experienced foreign journalists to assist Chinese editors, for the enlightenment of the people"

"Oh, yes, yes" Ta Tung endorsed every word.

"Young people with new knowledge like you are very useful in this respect We need you very badly"

Ta Tung was happy beyond words

"And third, the immediate building of railways and the opening of mines and factories"

"Yes, the wealth of the nation must be developed"

"And fourth, the immediate reform of the currency and the establishment of finance on a sound basis And when the national finance is all right, then fifth, the building up of an adequate army and navy for the country's defence"

"Excellent! Excellent!" Ta Tung felt that this Englishman was no less than the saviour of China How different he was from Mr. Ma-Ke-Lao and other narrow-minded missionaries who talked of nothing except saving the souls of the heathens.

"And sixth, the establishment of a Cabinet of eight

Ministers, one half Manchus and Chinese and the other half foreign officials who would know of the progress of the world."

"One half Manchus and Chinese, and the other half foreigners?"

"And seventh, above this Cabinet, the appointment of two foreign advisers to the Throne."

"Two foreign advisers?"

"With these things done, it will be possible to carry out four great measures educational reform, economic reform, internal and international peace, and spiritual regeneration in China."

"Does China require spiritual regeneration under the guidance of foreign missionaries?"

But Mr. Li Ti-Mo-Tai did not hear him. .

"God shows no partiality towards any nation, East or West. The nation that obeys God prospers, and the nation that disobeys perishes, according to unalterable law."

Whatever the Englishman said after that, Ta Tung did not hear. He had agreed to every word up to the fifth proposal. When it came to the sixth, he doubted whether it would be wise to let the Government be run by foreigners who could not understand the Chinese mentality. Then came the seventh proposal of two foreign advisers directly under the Crown and above the eight ministers, which, if adopted, would put China into a state of dependency. When the spiritual regeneration of China was mentioned, Ta Tung's eyes began to blur, and the image of the benign Li Ti-Mo-Tai rapidly faded away before him. He saw, instead of the friend of China and of his uncle, a very narrow-minded man who was suffering from a superiority-complex, standing in front of him and trying to persuade him that unless the Europeans came to take over the government of the country, China would be hopeless. It was no use. He could no longer take in what was said to

him. He had built such a magnificent castle in the air, and now that it had suddenly crashed down in a thousand pieces, he felt it was almost unbearable. He remained silent for a while and then absent-mindedly took a hurried leave. He did not at all know in what kind of a state his abrupt departure had left his host.

When Lotus Fragrance came back to the hotel, she found that she could not do anything. She looked over the few old books in the room and had to put them away. Formerly, when she was homesick, she used to read poetry, which never failed to occupy her mind. But now, as she was humming the poem, her mind was on Ta Tung, wondering how the interview was getting on. She was full of anticipation. She thought that at any rate her husband would not waste his time any more but would use it with great profit in serving the country and society. Whenever the sound of footsteps was heard in the courtyard, she would open her door and have a look.

At long last she was not disappointed. Ta Tung had come back. It is said that women are better observers of expressions than men. Lotus Fragrance, being a woman, at once saw that Ta Tung's depression had only one meaning—disappointment.

"Not so good as we had hoped?" she asked.

When he saw her sympathetic and comforting smile, he realised that he had reached his temporary home.

"It would have been much better if I had not met him!"

"He didn't want to help you at all?"

"His attitude towards me personally was all right. It was his opinion of our people as a whole which I could not accept. China is in a mess only because the present Government is corrupt. It doesn't mean that we have nobody to put the nation on its feet again. To have Europeans to govern us is to treat China as an uncivilised country of savages. I don't care what he is going to do to

help me. We must part company. I'd rather starve than work with such people."

She took it as calmly as possible, though her tears flowed inwardly and she had to swallow them. She fully realised that their present circumstances left them little or no choice in finding some kind of work, but she believed that her husband's decision was right. However, she immediately reviewed their financial situation and found that they had only a few taels left. It is said that the more hard-up a man is, the more he will pretend that he is well off. They decided that they had better immediately pay the rent of the room in advance, though it was not due until the day after to-morrow. Taking a few small pieces of silver, Ta Tung went to see the manager.

Usually, when he was paying his rent—and it was always a day or two in advance, though now that the manager had got to know them better he would never have asked for it even if it were late—Ta Tung always assumed an air of having plenty of money. He never forgot to smile at the manager when parting with his silver. But on this particular occasion he did not remember to force a smile until it was too late. He suddenly realised that he must look very depressed, and tried to make a great effort to smile. It must be noted that this smile was much worse than no smile. . . .

The manager, who was making up the accounts and working on an abacus under the light of an oil lamp, asked Ta Tung to sit down and have a chat.

"Mr Li, I have something which I wanted to discuss with you for a long time" His fingers, leaving the beads in the abacus, began to stroke his beard "I have been keeping this hotel for more than thirty years and without boasting, I have seen, passing in and out before me, a score of thousand guests coming from the south, going to the north, in spring or summer, in autumn or winter

Old and young, rich and poor, honest and dishonest, they seldom escape my notice I do whatever I can for all my patrons, and never once in my life has anybody ever complained about my service. I know from your behaviour and that of your good lady, both honourable people from good families, that owing to some unforeseen circumstances you are not at present comfortably situated. Am I not right?"

Ta Tung did not like to assent, but neither could he deny.

"The way you have never allowed your rent to become overdue has clearly indicated that you do not want people to suspect that you are hard up. I can quite understand your feelings I always put myself in other people's places If I were you, Mr Li, I would be just the same One is naturally shy about these matters. But I assure you, I speak to you with the best of intentions Even if I cannot help you, perhaps my counsel and advice may be of service to you. I have been dealing with people for forty years and my experience is not too limited So if you have temporarily exhausted your travelling purse, you needn't be shy in telling me frankly Every time I have received your rent, I have felt a little bit uneasy. Since you are such respectable people, why don't you tell me that you want to remove to one of your native guild hostels? They don't charge rent, and that would help you a lot!"

"What! No rent?"

"Why, didn't you know it? And besides, there will be many famous and influential people from your Province, your Prefecture and even your District, visiting these places very frequently, and they may be able to find some suitable work for you "

"We did not know that there were such guild hostels. Who established them and what are they for?"

"The rich and successful people of every district, grate-

ful for their own good fortune, give generously for such establishments, and they are provided to give free rooms for candidates who come to Peking from their native districts for the final state examinations. Most of these students are not well off, and some of them bring their families with them. When they fail one year, they have to stay for two or three years more for the next examination. If I were the greedy manager of some disreputable inn I would never suggest this to you."

Ta Tung was more than grateful to the elderly manager, and told him very briefly about their meeting with robbers on their journey. He thanked the manager again and again for his kindness, and after obtaining some addresses, decided to move into one of the guild hostels the very next day. The manager made him take his money back and bade him good-night. Ta Tung almost ran to his room to tell Lotus Fragrance of the unexpected good news, and the young couple began to get excited. Ta Tung said in high spirits

"Let us pack up immediately, so that we can move into a guild hostel the first thing to-morrow morning."

"But, my dear young lord and master, what is there to pack?"

Ta Tung looked around the almost bare room and could not help smiling at his misfortune, which now proved to be a great convenience.

He blew out the oil lamp and they went to sleep feeling extremely happy.

CHAPTER X

*"Too bad sometimes turns to good
Ill-luck turns as ill-luck should
Round the orphan, first and last,
All the care of Heaven is cast"*

THE golden rule for good gate-keepers of public places is snobbery, and the gate-keeper of the Kiangsi Provincial Guild Hostel was one of the best in the capital. He had no need to look at Ta Tung twice to determine that this young man must be a servant. He even thought that, such being the servant, the master was undoubtedly very second-rate. He usually had a charming smile for first-class visitors and residents, an ordinary appearance for the second-rate and a long face for the common people. The kind of face he showed to Ta Tung is impossible to put down on paper.

When he heard Ta Tung's enquiry about rooms in this Guild Hostel, he produced a series of dry crackling sounds which were meant to be laughter and said very curtly that since the establishment of the building it had never before been inhabited by anyone less than a "Selected Man"—one who has successfully passed his Intermediate State Examination—or an official whose rank was lower than that of the seventh. Perceiving that Ta Tung was about to protest, he hurriedly added that at any rate no rooms were available at present, and told him to try at the Nanchang Prefecture Guild Hostel which was farther down in the same street.

Lotus Fragrance had been a step behind, but she arrived in time to hear the last part of the gate-keeper's speech. While Ta Tung was inclined to demand to see the place and meet the man in charge of the hostel, she quietly pulled his sleeve and indicated that they had better take their leave.

They walked southwards along the Main Street outside the Shun Chih Men, and within two hundred yards came upon the Nanchang Prefecture Guild Hostel. The gate-keeper of this establishment received them coldly and also informed the young couple that certain qualifications and references were required for their acceptance, and that at present all the rooms were occupied. This man was slightly more polite and kind than the other, and advised them to try at the Nanchang District Guild Hostel, where no restrictions prevailed and which was to the east outside the Chien Men. There was nothing for it but to go there and they had to ask the way several times because it was situated in a back street among several small back streets.

Old Hou, the keeper of this building, was a very obliging old man who, with his wife and son, undertook every possible duty required in the hostel. He was practically the manager, the treasurer, the butler, the valet, the porter, the gardener, the chef, the caretaker and the door-keeper, his wife was the housekeeper, the parlour-maid, the housemaid and the assistant cook, while their young son served as the page and errand boy. Old Hou, though a native of Peking and never having been in Nanchang all his life, considered himself a Nanchang man and received them warmly. On hearing that they had never known of the existence of such a Guild Hostel before and that they had been staying for two months in a hotel, he exclaimed immediately:

"What a pity! You should have come here long ago. We are always slack during the first and last few months of the year and we would have been able to accommodate you."

"Are all the rooms taken now?" Lotus Fragrance asked anxiously.

"Yes, I am afraid so, young mistress"

"Oh!" Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance exclaimed simultaneously and looked at each other in despair

"But the southern rooms have lately become empty." Mrs Hou cast a queer look at her husband.

"What southern rooms?" he asked.

"Those in the inner courtyard "

He now cast a queer look at her and replied hesitatingly

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten about them. You go there first and see if they are all right."

"Perfectly all right. I swept and dusted them only yesterday. Come with me, young mistress."

"When do you want to move in?"

"Now, if it is all right," Ta Tung replied.

"Have you got your luggage outside? Who is looking after it?" Turning to his son he said "Go out and bring the luggage in"

"Please don't trouble yourself" Lotus Fragrance promptly stopped the boy. "We have no luggage besides these two small parcels in our hands We . . . we met with robbers on our way . . ."

"How terrible, young mistress!" Old Hou exclaimed. "I hope they didn't hurt you"

"No, thank you," Ta Tung replied "They only took all our money . . ."

"And all our luggage, of course," Lotus Fragrance put in hurriedly.

"You must have been terribly frightened, young mistress," said Mrs Hou, as she pushed open the doors and ushered them into the southern rooms.

This was a suite of two rooms There were a small square table and four stools in the outer one, which was used as a sitting- and dining-room and a hard-board bed, an oblong table and two stools in the inner one which was the bedroom. Under their feet there was no floor It was damp paved earth The wallpaper was water-stained and

torn here and there. The few articles of furniture looked ugly and coarse. The papered windows were cracked and had turned a yellowish grey. Yet both Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance felt as if they had discovered a new continent and said they were overjoyed. Mrs. Hou then showed them that there were two small earthen stoves and a water jar in the passage outside. That was their kitchen if they wanted to cook for themselves, or they could board with Old Hou at a very reasonable charge, which was calculated meal by meal. Lotus Fragrance said she herself would cook. She had never cooked before, but she thought that even if the worst came to the worst, she could always rely on sweet potatoes or baked cakes.

When they were by themselves, Lotus Fragrance began to make a list of things without which they could not possibly live. It was a long list and they cut it again and again until all that remained on the paper was "bedclothes, lamp, bowls, chopsticks, firewood, rice, oil and salt, and vegetables". Ta Tung had to go out and buy these articles, and they cost them more than half of all they had. When Mrs. Hou saw what they had bought, she knew they still lacked quite a lot. Since she knew they had met with misfortune, she lent them whatever was required, and taught Lotus Fragrance how to cook.

Lotus Fragrance now learnt that culinary ability was quite an art and required a great deal of practice. To cook simple plain rice was something which she found extremely difficult. Even following strictly the directions given by Mrs. Hou, she could never succeed in cooking the rice. The water was either too much or too little, the fire was either too fierce or too weak. The result was always that while the rice on the bottom of the saucepan was burned, there was an excess of water on top and in the middle the rice was still raw. Though it cost very little more to have a proper meal of rice than of

potatoes or cakes, they had a lot of trouble before Lotus Fragrance learned to cook properly.

Soon they learned that there were about a dozen inmates in the building, which had a very homely atmosphere. They felt very much at home when they heard their neighbours talk with the Nanchang accent, which they had not heard since they left their native city. At first, all the people in the Hostel seemed to be greatly surprised at finding the southern rooms occupied, and tried to avoid coming near the place. At last a very quiet young man who lived opposite them came over one morning and talked to them. He seemed to be rather shy and yet he addressed himself mostly to Lotus Fragrance. His surname was Ting, and his school name Ho-San. Though he was a native of Nanchang and spoke in the native accent, he was born in Hai-An, near the District of Seman, where his father was once the Magistrate. He had been educated in Canton and had never been to Nanchang. He had come to Peking waiting to enter the University.

Ta Tung found Ting Ho-San well-read and a very likeable personality. He did not speak as much with Ta Tung as he did with Lotus Fragrance because he considered the Cantonese accent to be a man's language and the Nanchang accent that of women. In his boyhood he had found all the women at home—his mother, aunt, nurse and maid—who all came from Nanchang, had spoken with the Nanchang accent, while his father, his teacher and the local men-servants all spoke Cantonese. So he had acquired the habit of speaking with one accent to the ladies and with another to the men. This had become so deeply planted in his mind that now he could not possibly speak in the Nanchang accent with his friends. As none of the men in the Guild Hostel could speak Cantonese, he was very lonely until the arrival of Lotus Fragrance, with whom he could speak in the Nanchang accent. He told her that both his

parents were dead, and seemed to look upon her as on a member of his own family.

Lotus Fragrance felt there was something queer about the rooms they occupied and, seeing Ting Ho-San was a truthful man, asked him why people seemed to avoid coming near their door.

"No. Don't know anything about this. Have been asked not to tell you."

"Then you know there is something wrong? Tell me, please."

"No, mustn't, or you'll be frightened to death!"

"Frightened to death? Are the rooms haunted by ghosts?"

"No. Died only a few days ago."

"Who died?"

"The man who occupied these rooms."

"I am not afraid of ghosts," Lotus Fragrance said resolutely.

"Do you know what caused his death?" Ta Tung put in anxiously. "Was it consumption?"

"No. Old age. Was eighty. Been here forty odd years. Hoped to obtain an official post. No money. Probably lost contact with his home."

"Poor devil! We don't mind sharing the rooms with him" Ta Tung was rather relieved.

"Poor fellow! Hope I'll not follow him," Ting Ho-San exclaimed.

Of the other tenants, there was a man who had met Ta Tung in the entrance hall many times, yet who had only slightly nodded to him. He had a grand air and seemed to be extremely busy, probably having several dinner engagements each day. Ting Ho-San said that this man actually held a very small office in one of the numerous useless Yamen in the capital, but he had been misnamed "The

Great Official" because he was in the habit of telling people that he was one, and thoroughly enjoyed being called by such a nickname.

One day an elderly gentleman who lived in a room in the outer courtyard came to call on Ta Tung. Pulling a long face, he said.

"My worthy nephew, let your elder uncle give you a little advice. Go home as soon as you can. Peking is not a place where the roads are paved with gold and the houses have golden roofs. Do you think you can pick up a fortune here? No, you are mistaken, as I was years ago. When I saw the yellow tiles from a distance, I thought they were really made of gold. But since then I have never seen a grain of this metal except in a shop window. Who is your father? I'll write to him and ask him to get you home."

"I have no father," Ta Tung replied stubbornly. "And I thank you for your advice which is wasted on me."

The elderly man went away very angry, and Ting Ho-San told Ta Tung that he mustn't mind about this eccentric man. He was known as "the Elder Uncle" and was in the habit of lecturing every one in the hostel and addressing his victim as his "worthy nephew". Ting also had had his free advice when he first arrived.

All the other neighbours were kind to Ta Tung and his wife. Some of them were hard up "Selected Men" waiting here to attend the State examination, and some were looking for jobs. One of the Selected Men, a Mr Cheng, liked Ta Tung very much, for he too was in favour of reform. He introduced Ta Tung to a Mr. Wen Tin-Shih, who had once been the teacher of the Imperial Concubines but had lost the Empress Dowager's favour because of his radical ideas. When Lotus Fragrance heard that Ta Tung was going to see the retired Teacher of the Imperial Concubines, she said.

"The days are getting warmer and your silk padded coat often makes you sweat. Besides, while everyone is wearing a single lined coat, it scarcely looks nice for you to wear a padded one. Now that you are going to pay a formal visit to a stranger we must get a single lined coat for you . . ."

"Please don't bother I can still wear the coat. We are not in a position to buy any new clothing."

"We are not going to buy anything. I have been thinking of taking away the cotton puffs in my coat and also the silk puffs in yours. To-night you must go to bed earlier so that I may work on your coat."

"No. I like to be warm It is silly to dress up for other people."

When Ta Tung came running back from Mr. Wen's house the following day, Lotus Fragrance knew that there was some good news. Before entering the outer room he said

"Mr Wen is a marvellous man. He thinks we have a glorious future."

"How nice!"

"He said that within a few months China may become a modernised nation." Ta Tung was so excited that he had to wipe away the big drops of perspiration from his forehead. "We'll have a new army, a new navy, and a new . . ."

"And a new single lined coat for you instead of this sweat-producing garment," said Lotus Fragrance with a smile "I hope he can find some work for you."

"Ah, that reminds me. I composed a poem at Mr Wen's house—for he is a great poet, you know—and it sounds not too bad."

"Let me hear it." She was always anxious to hear his poems.

"The subject he gave me was 'Poverty', for he is also

hard up It is well known that unless a poet is hard up, his poems can never be perfect My verse is as follows

*'Firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea,
They are plentiful everywhere but not in our house.
When things are wrong there's no use to worry,
Let us dig in the moonlight and plant some plum
flowers.' "*

"Divine!" Lotus Fragrance was enchanted. "Let us dig in the courtyard to-night and plant some flowers."

"Do you really like it?" Well, Mr. Wen was so pleased with it that he said he was going to send me to the reformist General Yuan Shih-Kai, the Inspector of Forces, who has a private residence in Peking and is looking for a secretary. It is a very difficult job because he wants a man who is both a classical scholar and one well educated in new knowledge. Those recommended to him had been either good literary men who knew no English or graduates from abroad who could scarcely write a letter in Chinese He thinks I am just the man He wants me to go and see General Yuan tomorrow Here is his letter of introduction . . here . . eh . . Where on earth is it?"

He searched his pocket but could not find it. More perspiration appeared on his forehead and he fumbled a piece of crumpled paper out of his sleeve to wipe it.

"Have you lost your handkerchief again? With what are you wiping your perspiration?"

"Eh? Why, the letter!"

"Good Heavens! It is ruined!"

"No, I don't think so. I have smudged the words on the envelope a little, that's all."

"And it's crumpled into a ball!"

"You can iron it out and make it flat again."

"If you had let me remake your coat for you, you

wouldn't have sweated so much and the letter would not be in such a mess."

"All right, you win! I'll take it off after supper and go to bed early. We can't dig in the courtyard to-night."

Of course they couldn't dig in the courtyard that night. When Lotus Fragrance borrowed a pair of scissors from Mrs Hou and cut up the seams of the silk coat, she called out:

"Why, Ta Tung, we are rich. The Great-aunt has concealed in the coat thirty taels of silver in notes for you."

"What!" Ta Tung rushed into the outer room.

"Look! They are badly crumpled, but still usable."

"We are rich! Good old great-aunt!" Ta Tung danced with joy.

"Get to bed immediately. Don't you realise you are not properly dressed?"

They passed a blissful night, and Ta Tung went to General Yuan's private residence in Peking the next morning. The letter, though badly crumpled and smudged, worked like a talisman, and the lacquered secondary gates were opened wide to give him a cordial welcome. In his worn, ragged old uniform, the Inspector came to the gates to usher his guest through several courtyards and middle chambers into his private reception room. Ta Tung remembered that his uncle had once told him if a man had a short body with long legs he was bound to be an errand boy, whereas if he had a long body but short legs, he was sure to occupy the most important seat in a Yamen. Yuan answered to the second description. When he was walking side by side with his guest he was much shorter than Ta Tung. But when they sat down, Ta Tung seemed to find his host half a head taller than himself. Yuan's almost square head, very broad shoulders and loud voice all impressed him deeply. In Ta Tung's mind, Yuan was more or less the image of Napoleon.

He told Ta Tung that he was but a common soldier, and it was a great honour for him to be visited by such a brilliant scholar, whom his esteemed friend Mr. Wen had recommended so highly. Ta Tung was greatly embarrassed at receiving compliments, especially from such a great man, and, knowing his sympathy for the Reform, started to talk about his interview with Li Ti-Mo-Tai. He told his host that he was disappointed, not only because the Englishman proposed that foreigners should be put at the head of the Government to run the country but also because of his dragging religion into politics.

"We want reform because we want to advance with the times, and Li Ti-Mo-Tai is determined to bring us back into the mediæval age by making politics and religion inseparable. I have no objection to Christianity for private individuals. I even believe it may do good to some people. But to introduce religious reformation to China is to cultivate trouble and confusion. Why can't they learn their lessons from the massacres caused by religious differences and persecutions?"

"People like Li Ti-Mo-Tai are useful when carefully checked, though rather dangerous if allowed to have their own way. Treat them as your instruments, not as your masters, or even partners. Our greatest need at the moment is a well-equipped modern army. With that, we can then do what we like. Mr. Wen says you are a classical as well as a modern scholar. I am most anxious to hear your constant instructions. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to descend to accept the small post of directing me in all my literary affairs."

Ta Tung was overwhelmed by the gracious manner in which this great soldier indicated that he wanted to engage him as his private secretary. He regarded it as too good to be true and couldn't find words to reply. Yuan seemed to know what was in the young man's mind, and stood up

to confirm his offer and bid him goodbye.

"If you want to consider for a day or two before doing me the favour of accepting this small post, I want to tell you that I shall be waiting anxiously for your early favourable decision. In the meantime I'll write to my esteemed friend, Mr. Wen, to thank him for introducing you to me, and he will no doubt persuade you to condescend to help me."

He bowed to Ta Tung and saw him out of the room.

It was a long walk from Yuan's residence home, and when Ta Tung arrived at the Nanchang Guild Hostel he felt very hungry. He looked forward to enjoying a hearty meal and thought that Lotus Fragrance's art of cooking was now nearing perfection. To his utter disappointment, he found that his wife was not there, the saucepans were empty and the stove cold. He could hardly believe it. Never before had she gone out while he was away except once, and that was when she had pawned her fur coat. He asked Mrs Hou if she knew where his wife had gone to, and she replied that she had vaguely heard that the young mistress had requested Mr. Ting to take her to the Tung An Market early in the morning.

When one is waiting for somebody, the time passes slowly. Ta Tung felt a minute to be as long as a year, and his hunger increased with each minute. Ages seemed to have passed before he heard Lotus Fragrance coming back in the company of Ting Ho-San. For the first time in his life Ta Tung sensed a feeling of misery, and was silent when she entered the inner room in high spirits. He looked away from her and said coldly.

"Do you realise what time it is now? If you have had your luncheon, I haven't yet."

"Neither have I. But when one is doing a little shopping, time simply flies away . . ."

"Let us forget your shopping for a moment and see

about some food I'll make the fire and wash the rice."

He was going for the stoves in the passage but was stopped by her.

"No, I want to show you what I have bought first. Look here . . ."

"Leave it on the table for the time being. I'll see it later." He tried to pass her without casting her a glance.

"But I want you to try it on first in case it won't suit your eyes. The man said it was the shortest-sighted pair of glasses made, and so it ought to be all right for you. He promised to exchange it for another pair if you are not so short-sighted . . ."

Ta Tung received the glasses in dead silence and tried them on in an absent-minded manner. He then stared at her and remained motionless.

"What is the matter with you, Ta Tung? Haven't you been wishing to have a pair of glasses for a long time, since your eyesight is so bad because of reading too much in the . . . in the . . . at night? Now that we have a little money and you are likely to do a lot of reading and writing, such a thing will be indispensable!"

After a long pause, Ta Tung heaved a deep sigh and said

"Of course I have always been wishing to have a pair of glasses! But I could not help observing that you have never once thought of yourself first, and that your little mind is always thinking of me. Even the minutest thing about me never escapes your consideration. And I was almost angry with you!"

"Angry, were you? I think you are hungry. They always go together"

"Yes, terribly hungry. General Yuan, the wretch, only asked me to be his secretary, but forgot to ask me to stay for luncheon"

Lotus Fragrance was overjoyed at the news and they started to cook their luncheon immediately.

Two days later Mr. Wen Tin-Shih came to the Hostel to return Ta Tung's call, and said that Yuan had written asking him to persuade Ta Tung to accept his humble offer. Ta Tung needed little persuasion, and Mr. Wen suggested that work should commence from the first of the next month. Ta Tung agreed, and thanked him for his kindness. Leaving Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance, whom he asked to call on his wife sometimes, he then went over to Mr. Cheng's room to pay a hurried visit, after which he left. Though Mr. Wen now lived in poverty and obscurity, he still had a very high reputation. And his call on Ta Tung became the talk of the hostel. The people in the building soon learned about Ta Tung's good fortune with General Yuan, and were happy for him. But the Elder Uncle came to give him a further lecture.

"My worthy nephew," he started in his conventional way, "let your elder uncle give you some useful advice. Don't think that you can make your fortune with such a treacherous man as Yuan Shih-Kai. I happen to know him to be a drinker and debauchee. Only recently he took a concubine who was a notorious ex-sing-song girl. They say a young man from Shanghai, wishing to obtain office, presented her to him and the cunning old fox accepted the girl but the poor man remained empty-handed and is still drinking the north-west wind. It is believed that the man paid eight thousand taels of silver for the prostitute. Take heed, my worthy nephew, and don't associate yourself with such horrible people but go home. You are still young and don't know how depraved society is . . ."

"Yes, it is full of objectionable elder uncles who force unwanted advice on others. I wish you good night"

Ta Tung ushered the angry man out without further argument.

Ta Tung wrote to General Yuan to thank him for his courtesy in receiving him, and also for the message brought by Mr Wen. He accepted the post formally, and soon Yuan sent him a very courteous letter confirming that he would be expecting Ta Tung's brilliant presence to illuminate his shabby study on the first of next month. In it he mentioned that he hoped a miserable and meagre sum of twenty taels of white gold—which meant silver, of course—as his humble contribution towards Ta Tung's monthly expenses for firewood and water, would not be considered as utterly unacceptable.

On the eve of the new moon, Ta Tung's neighbour, the so-called "Great Official", sent an invitation to Ta Tung requesting his company for dinner at a famous restaurant in the East City. Ta Tung refused, and the man immediately came over to make a personal appeal.

"Mr Li, I have been an admirer of your literary talent for a long time and am most anxious to have your company at dinner this evening. I've asked a few great officials to form a small party, and you must give me face. I knew General Yuan's superior official, Viceroy Jung Lu, when he was the vice captain of the Imperial Guards, and I think Mr Wen also knows me, though I do not know him. Years ago, when he was holding a small office in the Tsung Li Yamen, his superior official used to call on me very often. So the present circumstance has brought you and me more closely together than we realise . . ."

"Forgive me for not accepting your kind invitation, but I am dining with a very great official to-night," Ta Tung replied with a smile.

"Oh! Who is this great one?"

"None other than the Nei-Wu-Fu Tsung-Kuan (the Grand Keeper of the Imperial Household.)"

The Great Official was staggered but went on.

"Oh! It must be a grand banquet with many guests. Perhaps the Tsung-Kuan would spare you."

"Oh, no! I am the only guest, and promised to be early."

The Great Official looked incredulous, but had to withdraw his invitation and retire.

The banquet given by the Grand Keeper of the Imperial Household consisted of one dish. It was stewed pork, and at this very minute the Grand Keeper was stooping over the stove and saucepan mixing its ingredients. Ta Tung was faithful to his promise and, having bid goodbye to the Superior Official, he hurried forward to give her a helping hand. Lotus Fragrance, who had heard every word of the absurd conversation, exclaimed:

"Ta Tung, you ought not to have told a lie to get rid of the Great Official."

"But I am trying to be fair. You are as much the Grand Keeper of the Imperial Household as he is the Great Official!"

A clever girl can always learn to be an excellent cook with the necessary direction and experience. Though Lotus Fragrance had never been near the kitchen when at home in Nanchang, by now she could cook a few dishes which, though utterly unorthodox in the eyes of experts, were nevertheless quite original. They had a style and flavour of their own, and Ta Tung was *her* connoisseur. Whenever she was busy in the passage, which was the kitchen, he would be keeping her company, trying to help her by bringing the dishes to the outer room. It must be noted that he was only *trying* to help her, for in most cases he would be holding the dish carefully with both hands, going with it into the outer room and proceeding into the inner room, when he would remember that he had something to say to her, and would return to the

passage again still with the dish in his hands. Lotus Fragrance never failed to appreciate his graceful, dignified and measured step, but when she saw that he had been bringing the dish in and out, out and in too many times, she would interrupt whatever he was saying and exclaim

"You are not helping me, but actually rehearsing for the next performance of the ceremonious sacrifice to be held at the Temple of Confucius!"

Ta Tung liked stewed pork, but since they never had any money he had not tasted it for a long time. On this important occasion Lotus Fragrance had decided to try her hand at it, and bought a very nice piece of pork. Mrs Hou told her the proportion of wine, bean sauce, salt and water to be mixed with the meat, and when all the ingredients were put into the saucepan, the lid had to be placed on it and it had to be brought to boiling point, after which it had to simmer until it smelt really very nice. She was told that the instructions must be carefully followed. As it would take a long time to cook, she must refrain from opening the lid of the saucepan now and again to see how it was getting on. As steam began to come from the boiling pan, her hand was itching to lift the lid and have the slightest peep. But she remembered her instructions and felt that she must never spoil their first dish of stewed pork.

"Let us go into the room instead of waiting here. Mrs Hou said the longer it simmered the better it tasted. Let us get the table ready. My cooking has greatly improved recently. I seem to have become an expert cook very rapidly. When the time comes for us to go home, I'll cook a complete feast for my mother, and she will be greatly amazed."

"I too hope that General Yuan will soon bring the Reform Movement to a success, and when we have firmly established ourselves in Peking, we must invite my uncle

to the capital to stay with us for some time. He needn't work in Kan-chow any more, and I must take him to see Mr. Wen's library. It is not very big, but all the books are lovely editions and bindings. And for quantity he must visit General Yuan's house. I passed through five big rooms full of bookcases in his residence. Though uncle's collection is one of the best in Kiangsi Province, it cannot possibly be compared with either Mr. Wen's or Yuan's."

Lotus Fragrance had placed two pairs of chopsticks, two spoons and two rice bowls on the table and, as she had been busy all the afternoon, decided to sit down and rest awhile.

"I have a great admiration for your uncle's knowledge and character. But I do not understand why he should prefer to wear old and patched clothes rather than decent ones in order that he may collect books of good binding and edition. There is no meaning in editions and bindings. We can profit from reading a book printed and bound cheaply just as much as we can from one of a better edition."

"This is just a matter of personal taste. For instance, any woman is just as useful a wife as another. Why should I have determined many years ago that if it were not for a woman as clever, kind and pretty as you, I'd rather remain single all my life? It was a forlorn hope, but the result is that not only does my wife prove to be someone like you, but is actually you yourself!"

"What! Are you comparing me with books?" Lotus Fragrance's voice sounded offended. "So you are regarding me as a chattel, one of the movable properties which you can discard or exchange for others at any time as you like? I never dreamt that I would come to be regarded as a chattel by you!"

"Oh, no!" Ta Tung was alarmed. "I didn't mean it. I

thought books, being the highest form of intelligence and knowledge in the world, indeed occupied a more important position in the world than any human being. Er . . . er . . . if you don't like my comparing you with books, you may compare me with bookworms. Haven't you often said that I was a bookworm?"

"What! You a bookworm?" Lotus Fragrance could scarcely suppress her chuckle. "Do you mean that you want to eat me up?"

"Oh, no, no . . . er . . . er . . . I don't mean . . ."

"Hey, stop quarrelling," Ting Ho-San called out at the door. "Smoke is pouring out! Something burning! Smells awful!"

"Our stewed pork is gone!" Lotus Fragrance looked at Ta Tung with apprehension.

They went to their kitchen and found that the pork had become a heap of odious cinders. She said:

"When next I am cooking, don't you dare to speak with me! Who said that only when one is reading and writing must one not be distracted?"

"Never mind, we'll have some rice fried with eggs. I like that very much," Ta Tung said resignedly.

"Come to a small restaurant near the Chien Men with me." Ting Ho-San suggested "Just heard good news Peking University is established. Going there very soon."

Though Ta Tung envied his friend having the higher education which he himself was to miss, he felt somewhat consoled when he was almost ceremoniously received by General Yuan Shih-Kai, the Inspector of Forces, in his official dress. While he was impressive in his old ragged uniform, he seemed equally dignified in his rich long gown and jacket. He was waiting for Ta Tung near the entrance and, ushering him into the inner middle chamber, made a deep bow to him and conducted him into a beautifully furnished study. On an ebony desk elaborately

carved with various designs, the choicest stationery was placed. Two small bookcases of the same material and with the same patterns of carving were on one side of the room, while a carefully matched cabinet with many exquisite objects of art in it was on the other side. Showing him the chair at the desk, Yuan made a second bow to Ta Tung. The silence was then broken when Yuan, bidding him a temporary goodbye and saying that he hoped everything would suit his taste, hurried off to pay his official calls of the day.

Left alone, Ta Tung examined the study carefully. Yes, what he had suspected was right. The room was specially assigned to him, and not one which he had to share with his master. In the room there was nothing which indicated that it belonged personally to Yuan, and the books in the cases were either general literature or reference classics. Soon an attendant came in with a small pile of letters, all opened and carefully arranged, and a small piece of paper was placed over it on which was written, apparently in Yuan's hand, "Please decide and reply", and it was signed with the word "Kai".

Ta Tung glanced over them. They were almost all of them ordinary greeting letters, and some of them enclosed a poem or two, asking as a rule for Yuan's drastic correction, the term being "please chop it into the right shape by using your axe". The proper thing to do with them, he knew, was to answer these letters in classical literary style. As for the poems, he had to compose one to rhyme with each one submitted for correction. There were two letters in English, and both of them were written by missionaries who asked for an audience.

It only took half the morning for him to draft these replies, and when he had finished he had nothing to do. The attendant later on came in to serve tea and refreshments, and when he saw that all the letters were answered,

he told Ta Tung that the Master had said there was nothing else to be done and he could have the rest of the day to himself. However, Ta Tung stayed on, hoping that Yuan would come back soon and perhaps there would be more work for him. But at lunch-time word came that the Master was having the meal with friends outside, and in the meantime a sumptuous banquet was served for Ta Tung alone.

After lunch, Ta Tung glanced over the books in the study, and found the whole afternoon had passed away while he was immersed in literature. The attendant mentioned again, when bringing fresh tea and refreshments, that there was nothing more to be done that day, and Ta Tung began to realise that if he went home, the attendant would also be free for the day. Telling him to present the draft replies to the Master, Ta Tung went home feeling that he had acquired the easiest and best paid job in the world. When he told Lotus Fragrance about it, she said that she would like to have such a job, and to pay for it instead of receiving a salary.

"Since you are so generous with money, Lotus Fragrance, may I have two taels of silver before the shops are closed tonight?" he asked in a rather uneasy tone

"Of course. But you mustn't squander it on anything for me."

"Never fear." He disappeared as soon as he was given the money.

"What is it?" she asked him when he came running back. He was panting and sweating, and carried a small packet carefully wrapped up

"A lovely edition of Po Chu-I's poems, which I have been longing to buy for Uncle Kang"

CHAPTER XI

*"In painting a tiger, we can copy his coat but not
his bones,
And in dealing with a man, we can see his face but
never fathom his mind"*

IT has ever been the nature of human beings to aspire to the talents and the knowledge they most lack. A literary man likes to talk about military strategy and feels happier if someone flatters him by saying he would make a great general than by merely calling him a man of letters. On the other hand, a famous soldier considers praise of his military talents superfluous, but generally has a weakness for poetry, and nothing pleases him more than to be addressed as a poet.

Yuan Shih-kai was well known as the ablest soldier of his age. Though not a Manchu, he was given the task of training a new army at Shiao-Chan, not far from Peking and Tientsin. For a Chinese who was still under forty years of age to hold such an important military office was sufficient to show that the Manchu court held him in very high esteem. It was therefore excusable that he should regard himself unquestionably as a military genius, and that it was only in the literary world that he could make further conquests. Had he been an illiterate, things would have been easy for him. An ordinary clerk would have been all he required. He would not have been able to tell the difference between the writings of such a secretary and of a brilliant scholar. But in his youth he had had a classical education, and therefore it had been very difficult for him to find a suitable private secretary. He considered that the writing of none of his previous secretaries, who had to sign their wretched compositions in his name, had done him justice. Now that the talk of reform was spreading everywhere, and, having very early shown his ready

sympathy with the young leaders of the new movement, he needed as his secretary someone who had some new knowledge as well, so as to be able to help him in things he had never heard of before but was desirous of knowing.

Wen's recommendation of Ta Tung was a stroke of luck for both parties. While Ta Tung was most anxious to get some decent work, preferably connected in some way with reform, Yuan was getting in Ta Tung the very person he had been looking for but had been unable to find. Ta Tung's classical literary style had a freshness of its own, and Yuan liked it better than that of anybody else because he considered it was what he would have attained himself had he had a little more time. Ta Tung's knowledge of English and ability to read and answer letters in that language greatly pleased him. Now he was able to write to the barbarians in their own savage tongue, just as the great poet Li Po of the Tang Dynasty had done—an outstanding feat in history and literature which he had never dreamt would be achieved once more by him, or, to speak strictly, by somebody in his name. He was so happy to have Ta Tung that from henceforward he left all his correspondence, with the exception of certain important and confidential letters, entirely in the hands of his new secretary.

As the days went by, Ta Tung found that Yuan was seldom at his house, and that he had to carry on his secretarial work by himself while his master was away. He soon got quite settled down to his duties, which were chiefly composing poems and couplets, writing essays for birthday celebrations or funerals, etc. There were also a large number of people who sent Yuan paper panels or folding fans on which they requested him to give some specimen of his calligraphy. Ta Tung had to do all these, to sign them in Yuan's name and stamp them with some of Yuan's seals specially engraved for such purposes. To

allow one's secretary to stamp and sign letters and other writings supposed to be done by oneself is quite a common occurrence. There is no question of committing the crime of forgery in this, or even of doing something improper. Money transactions and confidential documents, however, always require special seals, which one keeps oneself. A great man, who is generally busy, has no time to look into his social correspondence, and his confidential secretary has carte-blanche to attend to it.

Yuan's Yamen was in Tientsin, where his duty required him to be present. Besides, his nominal private residence was also there. Though his wife was in Honan, his native place, nearly all his concubines together with their children were in Tientsin. To escape from his tiresome work in the Yamen, as well as from the worries of his home, he liked to snatch a few days' blissful holiday now and again in Peking, where his most recent acquisition, his eighth concubine, called "Lady Number 9", was living. As most of the important people were in the capital, Yuan's policy of having an extra private residence in Peking was a very useful one. It enabled him to keep in constant touch with all the influential elements in the court.

Lady Number 9, a most beautiful and accomplished girl, was a great help to her husband. Besides being a capable mistress of his house, she was a marvel in social intercourse and did everything he could possibly hope for in entertaining his friends in Peking. While he was away in Tientsin, she would keep the big household in such perfect order that nobody would miss the master except herself. Knowing Ta Tung to be her husband's favourite find, she looked after the young man very carefully. Tea, refreshments and fruits of the season were served at frequent intervals, and she often supervised personally the tidying up of his study, which he had the deplorable habit of making in a mess. Not only did she see that everything

was put in order again, but she would also see to the addition of some finishing touches which could be done only by the hands of a woman of taste and accomplishments. Well selected brush pens were supplied before old ones were quite worn. New ink tablets replaced old ones just when they were half finished or looked smeared. Various articles of stationery on his desk had their places exchanged once in a few days, so that there was always an atmosphere of freshness. Lovely flowers in exquisite vases never ceased to decorate the room.

Either because he was very short-sighted or else too absent-minded, Ta Tung never seemed to notice and appreciate this lady's special attentions. He seldom cast a glance at the flowers, and even complained that the shifting about of the pen-holder and ink slab was very annoying. He said that the pen-holders should always be on the right and the ink slab on the left, and if they were in the wrong places it was very inconvenient for him. One day, however, to his great surprise, he found his desk had been moved slightly to one side and a large porcelain basin, glazed in a lovely light blue which was known as "the sky-blue after the passing of the rain", was placed next to his desk on an ebony stand. It was the sixth moon, and two early pink lotus blossoms, together with their luxurious large yellowish-green leaves, rose high out of the water in the basin. As he sat down in his chair a pure delicate fragrance was wafted to his nostrils. He looked at the flowers, at the basin and into the water. The colour, the scent and the name of the flower made him see the image of his wife, Lotus Fragrance, appearing in the water.

Looking at the image, his thoughts went back to the time when he had been inclined to be angry with her and found that she had bought him his first pair of glasses. He was overwhelmed by her devotion to him and her thought-

fulness. He then remembered her cheerfulness when they were living in dire poverty at the hotel, and also her winning smile when she told him that a gold bracelet was to be found in the pool of muck. His thoughts went even further back to the days when she was still a little girl. She was his first and only friend. He remembered that it was always she who smiled at him and made the first approach. When they were together, she had always to supply most of the conversation. Though he always wanted to be near her, he always also maintained a respectful distance from her. He could never forget that early morning in the late spring when they had sat by a pond looking into the water, and she had succeeded for the first time in getting quite close to him. It was a frightening experience, and yet it was thrilling and intoxicating. For the first time in his life a gentle, sweet aroma had entered his nostrils. It had made him rather uneasy and his heart had gone pit-a-pat.

Whenever he recalled that heavenly little episode he invariably seemed to be able to smell the gentle fragrance once more, and his heart would go pit-a-pat. As he sat now with the basin of flowers bringing this little scene tenderly to his memory, his heart was beating high and rapidly, and a sweet scent was wafted by the gentle breeze into his nostrils again. The aroma became more fragrant and more real, and at last he was brought back from his reverie by a strongly intoxicating perfume. He gradually felt that a warm atmosphere was approaching him from behind. When he turned to look, he saw a ravishingly beautiful lady standing near his chair.

Of Lady Number 9, the mistress of the house, he had heard a great deal. But this was the very first time he had seen her. She was tall and well-built, with striking and attractive features just like a Northerner. But her complexion and the delicacy of her skin revealed her Southern

origin. It is said that a Southerner with the features of a Northerner, or a Northerner with those of a Southerner, is bound to climb high, and Lady Number 9 had certainly attained a heavenly altitude. She was dressed as if she had come from the sphere of the immortals, wearing a very flimsy silk gown of light green which brought out everything that was lovely in her. She didn't look more than twenty, though she was probably much older. As it was rather unconventional for the mistress of the house to appear in the study like that, without any forewarning, Ta Tung stared at her in amazement and knew not what to say. She smiled and took a seat, hoping it would relieve him of his embarrassment.

"Please excuse my intrusion, Mr. Li. I came to ask you if you like these flowers. As I know you are a man of refined taste who appreciates lovely things, I ventured to order them to be placed here for the decoration of your study. No doubt they will inspire beautiful thoughts in your mind and you will be able to compose even more lovely poems. I am a very ignorant and uneducated girl who has only an elementary knowledge of poetry. I wonder whether you would be good enough to instruct me in the art of poetical composition, for which I have an ardent devotion. Will you accept such an ignoramus as your unworthy student, Mr. Li?"

Her eloquence and modesty surprised him even more than did her beauty. He wanted to refuse her bluntly, but somehow or other found it extremely difficult to do so. At last he had to consent.

"Don't be modest, Lady Number 9. Perhaps your poems are much better than mine. However, if you care to let me read some of them, I shall feel greatly privileged."

"That is very gracious of you, Mr. Li. I'll send my scribbled manuscript to you by my maid, and hope you'll apply your axe to it relentlessly."

"May I read them at home? My time here should be devoted to General Yuan's work only."

"Certainly, Mr. Li. But couldn't you stay here after the usual time and glance them over? I'll order them to prepare a light supper for you."

"No, thank you. I have an appointment to-day."

"Then take it with you, Mr. Li. Only don't show it to anyone else, please."

A thick volume of poems, neatly written in a feminine hand on lovely snow-white paper, was given to Ta Tung that afternoon. The binding was exquisite and it smelt fragrant. On his way home Ta Tung began to read it as he walked along the streets, which had gradually become familiar to him. Yes, lovely; the first poem in it was one of the best he had ever read. Though it was written by a woman, it had fire and power which few men could master. He hurried to read more, and was deeply absorbed in them. As he read on he found the poetess was very versatile, writing poems in various styles and on various subjects, romantic in one, heroic in another, philosophic in a third. Indeed, he had never come across before any poet with such variety in his writings. Yet, quite often, he found a few poems very badly written and thought it a shame for them to be kept among such a good collection. If he were the author, he would not hesitate for a moment to destroy such doggerel. After all, he realised that one was never a good judge of one's own work. The more he read, the more doggerel he found in the volume. The last two poems were the worst of all. It seemed to him that the poetess was like a man walking on a dark night along a narrow path between the ricefields. He could never be sure of his step, and was bound to put his foot now and again into the muddy water.

Ta Tung himself was very much in the same position.

With his short-sighted eyes concentrated on the book, he walked unsteadily in the muddy back streets, missed several turnings, and was far away from his home. When it began to get dark he realised that he must have passed his house, and began to find his way back. By the time he arrived home, Lotus Fragrance was waiting anxiously for him in the courtyard.

"Late as usual, Ta Tung. But didn't you remember that Mr. and Mrs. Wen are expecting us for dinner, to meet Mr. and Mrs. Yung?"

"I am sorry I am later than usual. Let us go at once. I was reading Lady Number 9's poems and lost the way."

"Lost your way again? Better have something to eat first. I've had to tell their messenger who was sent to urge us that you were detained on business, and that we'd be there soon after dinner."

"Mr. and Mrs. Yung have come back from America, and they will never forgive us if we are too late. Let's go now and have some supper when we come back."

"I have told them not to wait. And if we find they are still having their dinner, we must say that we have had ours. It won't look nice if they think we are trying to make for the dinner after we have missed it."

"Of course, I'll say whatever you tell me to say."

Just as she had thought. When the two late-comers arrived the dinner was almost finished, but the host and hostess and guests were still at the table. As it was a very informal one, they were asked to join at the table. Lotus Fragrance made an excellent excuse, saying that they had been delayed because Ta Tung had to finish an urgent despatch for General Yuan, and they had both had a very stuffy repast and couldn't eat a bite now. To this story Ta Tung gave ready support, but nevertheless they were made to sit down and to taste some of the dishes which the hostess said were not very bad. A servant served them

with rice. While Lotus Fragrance refused, saying she couldn't eat a morsel, Ta Tung received it absent-mindedly and began to swallow it at an astonishing speed. His wife cast an angry glance at him but it was wasted, and in next to no time he had a second, and was then about to have a third helping of the rice. While he was enjoying his meal in silence, she could not help feeling uncomfortable in the knowledge that other people were sure to see the hungry condition he was in. Desperately she tried to stop him, and looking at him from the corner of her eyes, she kicked him on the calf lightly. He felt it, hurriedly withdrew his leg, and went on with his rice. She had to kick him again, and this time harder.

"Why do you kick me on my calf?" he asked innocently.

Mrs. Yung, who had recently come back with her husband from the United States, was a very sociable person. In order to suppress her chuckle, and to divert the attention of the others, she said quickly.

"Mr. Li, I am sure you are a better judge of dishes than we semi-foreigners are. This splendid feast was cooked by Mrs. Wen herself, and I want you to tell us which dish you consider the best."

Ta Tung scanned the various elaborately prepared dishes. The fried chicken, the roast duck, the bird-nest soup, the stewed shark's fins—he had had enough of them, and they did not taste so nice when lukewarm. He was tasting a piece of cold cucumber, and in such hot weather a dish of undressed cucumber seemed to him to be better than all the others. He replied candidly:

"I think the cold cucumber is the best dish of all!"

"Why?" Mrs. Yung could scarcely believe her ears.

"Because its colour is so lovely." And he swallowed a second piece.

"You are the most original man I have ever met, Mr

Li!" Mrs. Yung was thoroughly amused by Ta Tung's words.

While the three men went to talk about reform, of which Mr. Yung was an ardent supporter, having contributed generously towards the movement, the ladies retired to the hostess's room where Lotus Fragrance tried her best to apologise for Ta Tung's absent-mindedness. Mrs. Wen remarked that when one was concentrating one's mind too much on important matters, it was only natural that one should neglect small things. She said that her husband, Mr. Wen was somewhat the same, often forgetting to pay for the books he bought. Mrs Yung seemed to like the young couple very much—she liked Ta Tung because, as she said, of his originality, and Lotus Fragrance because she was so sweet. She insisted that they must treat her as their sister, go to see her as often as possible, and, she added, remember her whenever they needed a friend. As she had to join a Mahjong party that evening, she made her excuses and went away with her husband. Ta Tung, remembering that Lotus Fragrance had scarcely eaten anything, also bade farewell to the Wens, thanked them for the dinner and for introducing them to the Yungs, and went home with his wife. He told her that he had had a splendid meal, and had found Mr Yung to be the best man he had ever known

Ta Tung arrived home late again on the following day, and continued to do so for several succeeding days. It is said that nobody knows a person better than his bedfellow. Lotus Fragrance immediately felt that her husband was beginning to become slightly different from his usual self. He was silent and pensive. He would abruptly smile at her and say that a certain poem by Lady Number 9 was heavenly, or another was dreadful. One day, when he seemed to be rapt in thought, she felt worried and asked him what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing," he tried to smile. "I am only wondering if it is possible for a person to have a double personality. Your intuitive knowledge of human nature sometimes astonishes me. Tell me, can one be a noble and sublime person at one moment and a very base creature at another?"

"Why are you so suddenly interested in this? Who is the person you want to analyse?"

"Nobody in particular," he replied uneasily. "For instance, I know a poet can be a divine writer at one moment, and a horrible poetaster at another . . ."

"Or rather, a poetess? Ta Tung, you must not think too much of Lady Number 9, especially while you are with me."

"But, to be honest, sometimes when I see you, I cannot help remembering her. Before I met her, I could not have believed that a woman who was different from you in every respect could be beautiful . . ."

"How tactless you are, Ta Tung! You are praising the beauty of your master's concubine in front of your wife!"

"You are not jealous, are you?"

"Shouldn't I be?"

But there was another person who was terribly jealous of Ta Tung's friendship with Lady Number 9. When Ta Tung was drafting some letters for Yuan one afternoon, the attendant came in to tell him that the Master was receiving an unwelcome visitor and wanted him to interrupt, which was termed "to relieve the siege". This was also one of Ta Tung's duties. Whenever Yuan was caught at home by any of his more intimate friends with whom he did not wish to waste his time, instead of giving them the excuse that he was "not at home", which they would know was not the case, he generally received the visitor

and gave instructions for Ta Tung to come to the reception room to relieve the seige

Taking some papers from his desk and putting them into a despatch folio, Ta Tung went hurriedly to the reception room. There he found Yuan sitting and talking in quite a familiar manner with someone who seemed to be Shiao Ming. Yes, it was Shiao Ming. Yet, strange as it was, Shiao Ming was not at all surprised to see him, but remained calm all the time. However, this was a shock to Ta Tung, and though he regained his composure immediately, Yuan had already noticed his queer expression. Before he had time to make his usual interrupting speech, Yuan remarked:

"Do you know my friend Mr. Li Shiao Ming?"

"Yes, I do," Ta Tung answered. "We . . . we . . . are . . ."

"We are from the same Province, we are both Kiangsi men," Shiao Ming put in.

"Talking of Kiangsi men," Yuan said jovially, "I must say that, though Kiangsi has produced some of our best scholars and philosophers, such as Tao Chien, Wang An-Shih, Ou-Yang Shui, and Wen Tien-Shiang, it cannot boast of a single soldier. General Chang Shun is one of our worst strategists and, though himself a Kiangsi man, all his rank and file are Hunan and Szechuan people. It is said that in his army there is only one Kiangsi man, and he in fact was naturalised in Kiangsi but actually came from Kweichow."

He looked at Ta Tung, who knew what was meant, and said.

"Excuse my interruption, but some urgent despatches have just come from the Yamen in Tientsin . . ."

"How trying!" Yuan threw up his arms in mock despair. "One never has a moment to spare with one's good friends! You will excuse me, won't you, Shiao

Ming? But you needn't go. Perhaps you two will have something to talk over about your marvellous Province."

He bowed and retired, leaving Ta Tung much easier.
"When did you come to Peking, younger brother? I didn't know you were coming."

Shiao Ming did not look so amiable as before. There was a sneer in his voice.

"But I knew when you left Nanchang for Peking, and I also know where you have established your 'golden mansion to hide your beauty' . . ."

"Don't be sarcastic, younger brother. I have written a long letter to my uncle Kang, telling him in detail about our trip to Peking. It was entirely approved by Aunt Wu . . ."

"What an obedient nephew and ideal son-in-law! But don't you know that your kind mother-in-law was so pleased with the elopement that she went to become a nun in the Nunnery of Sedate Intelligence, and your Grandmother-in-law died on the next day?"

Ta Tung was silent for a while, and then he said:

"There are other reasons for Aunt Wu's decision to become a nun. I was afraid that the grandmother could not stand the shock."

"You had very good foresight. And you did the Wu family a good service. Your father-in-law should be proud of you."

"Let us drop this." Ta Tung seemed to have lots of things to tell him but found it very difficult to explain. "Complications in our private family affairs must not interfere with our careers. We are grown men now. We should forget them, and try to serve society and the country. You are more gifted than I am, and should go far. I wish you had had some of the bitter experiences I have had."

Shiao Ming's breast was bursting with anger.

"Bitter experiences? I thought it was sweet romance!"
"Don't talk rot . . ."

"Don't talk nonsense! I thought you were a gentleman, but I find you are a hypocrite. After having eloped with your younger brother's wife, you have come here to steal your master's favourite concubine!"

"Do shut your filthy mouth!"

"What is the use? Everybody in this house knows it. Lady Number 9 is doting on the handsome young secretary . . ."

"Don't be absurd, my association with the lady is purely of a literary nature. We talk of nothing except poetry."

"Poetry and her mother's naked foot! She doesn't know how to write half a line of poetry to save her precious life! I know who writes poems for her."

"But I have read hundreds of poems of hers . . ."

"Yes, her former lovers had to make their contributions. Some of them rank among the most famous poets of the day. She simply copies them in her own hand and says they are her work. As I had been forced to compose a few not long ago, I can understand that now it is your turn . . ."

"Ah! You are right. The last two poems must be your work." Ta Tung laughed to himself. "How silly I was! I should have recognised my younger brother's phraseology. Now I understand!"

"I want to request you, Ta Tung, not to call me or refer to me as your younger brother. You know I am not, and never was. Though I am not as successful as you are, either in love affairs or in society . . ."

"But you are always the favoured one. Why, General Yuan treated you as his equal, while I am only one of his employees."

"I have spent over ten thousand taels because of him, and he has not yet fulfilled his promise to give me a small

post. And you are his confidential secretary, and his most favourite concubine is on rather intimate terms with you . . .”

“It isn’t true . . .”

“No use to protest. Formerly, when the husband was away in Tientsin, she could always spare a little time to meet her old friend, but since you came I have scarcely seen her.”

“If you insist on talking nonsense, I must leave you, for I have lots of work to do”

“What a perfect hypocrite you are! Farewell, my busy Grand Secretary. I do not want to give you away, not because of my love for you, but because I am unwilling to lose my own face, and you are making use of that to retain your mask of virtue . . .”

Ta Tung was already out of the reception room and did not hear the rest of the speech.

When he saw his wife that night, he looked at her tenderly and long and was unable to say anything

“Your manner alarms me more and more every day, Ta Tung. What is it that worries you?”

“Nothing of importance.”

“There is something Tell me, and you’ll feel better”

“I’ve learned that a poet can’t write two kinds of poetry . . .”

“That woman again?”

“Let me explain. I now know that beauty and intelligence seldom go together. She can’t write poetry”

“Your explanations are always much worse than no explanation. Stop praising that woman to me.”

“No. This concerns you.”

“Me?”

“Yes Do you know who composed that doggerel for her?”

“I don’t care. Please don’t tell me.”

"Shiao Ming did."

"What?"

"I found that Shiao Ming was her former lover, or rather, one of her former patrons, that she is no poet at all, that all the poems she showed me were written by her poet friends, and that Shiao Ming contributed the last two dreadful pieces."

"And where did she say Shiao Ming was?"

"She didn't say. But he is here."

"Here?"

"He came to see General Yuan this afternoon."

Lotus Fragrance was silent for a long time.

"I understand now. The Elder Uncle was right Shiao Ming was the young man from Shanghai seeking for a post. I think the time has come for you to resign."

"Why should I? I am not afraid of him."

"I don't like it. He must be on friendly terms with Yuan."

"Yes. He told me that he had spent more than ten thousand taels for this, and all he obtained was General Yuan's friendship. But Yuan has a very poor opinion of him."

"Did you ask him about the conditions at home? Had he heard from them recently?"

Ta Tung was silent for a second and then said slowly

"Grandmother died the next day after we left Nanchang—and—"

"And what?" she asked faintly and with apprehension.

"And Mother went to become a nun in the Nunnery of Sedate Intelligence"

"Oh, Mother!" She sobbed bitterly "My poor dear Mother!"

The two different tidings of her beloved ones, one of death and the other of life, proved too severe a blow for her. Naturally she grieved over the death of her grand-

mother, who loved her so dearly. But the news that her mother was still living, but that she was living in a nunnery, moved her much more than the former. To enter the Gates of Emptiness is to be completely cut off from the world, from one's family and children. To live and be separated for ever is as bad as to depart for the other world. Lotus Fragrance felt that she had now practically become an orphan, though nominally both her parents were alive.

Ta Tung tried his best to console her.

"When we had no answer to our letter, you always dreaded that Mother was dead. Now that we know she is alive, though in a nunnery, it is better than we thought, and you ought to take it calmly. Perhaps this is a good way out. You must realise how awkward it would have been for her to face the world after our departure. As for Grandmother, she was eighty-four, and therefore had attained a truly remarkable age. Moderate your grief, and perhaps one day we may still see Mother again."

When Lotus Fragrance had sobbed for some time, she reflected on what had been told her and said:

"For the sake of Mother, do leave General Yuan's house and Shiao Ming altogether . . ."

"You mustn't worry about that any more. I know where we are. Shiao Ming has no influence over General Yuan."

"But Lady Number 9 . . ."

"You needn't worry about that either . . ."

"Shiao Ming was her patron and may be still her lover."

"No. He doesn't mean anything to her now, otherwise she would use her influence over General Yuan for him."

"Anyway, I don't like you mixing with them."

"You don't understand."

Ta Tung's manners continued to be mystifying for

days, and Lotus Fragrance began to feel more and more uneasy when he was away and did not return home until late at night. As she was very much by herself, she had been visiting Mrs. Wen and Mrs. Yung quite often lately. She got on particularly well with Mrs. Yung as, having been a student at the missionary school, she could talk with Mrs. Yung about things in America and Europe. But Mrs. Yung was always busy with her Mahjong engagements, and they could not see each other as much as they would have liked to. Of the men she did not see much. They both seemed to be as busy or elusive as her own husband.

On the first of the eighth moon, Yuan was given an audience by the Emperor, and was promoted to be independent of his former superior, Jung Lu, the Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province. According to the usage of the Imperial Court, he had to present himself in audience on the next morning to tender his thanks to the Emperor in person, and to beg His Majesty to give him parting instructions before he went away to take up his new duty. It was reasonable that Ta Tung should be unusually busy. But on the third day, when Ta Tung did not come home until long past midnight, Lotus Fragrance was alarmed. Ting Ho-San offered to go to Yuan's private residence to enquire about him and she was very grateful. On reaching Yuan's House, he saw a shadow come out of the side door, and when he approached it, he found it was none other than Ta Tung. He told him that Lotus Fragrance was worrying about him, and they hurried home. She asked him what had kept him so late, but he said nothing.

About noon on the morning of the sixth, when Ta Tung was out, Mr. Hou suddenly announced that a Mr. Li had come to call on Lotus Fragrance on urgent business. She was greatly astonished when she saw, from the courtyard, Shiao Ming walking in.

"Oh!" she gasped, and sat down motionless.

Shiao Ming stood inside the doorway and, making a deep bow, remained there without going any further. Half grinning and half smiling, he said:

"Forgive me for not letting you know of my call earlier. But I can't help it. I see my presence has shocked and embarrassed you, Lotus Fragrance, but there are still worse things to come of which I have to inform you. Ta Tung has been arrested!"

"What?" She felt it was true, but she asked. "You are joking? I can't believe it. What has he done? Is it your treachery?"

"It has nothing to do with me." There was almost a smile of triumph on his face. "He was arrested by the Imperial Guards, and I heard the charge was high treason. As you are such a clever girl, I wonder why you didn't advise him to flee before he was captured."

"Nonsense! He is innocent," came her faint reply. She felt her soul had almost left her.

"No use saying that to me. I'm not his judge. If he didn't commit high treason, then he must have committed something else. Could it be that General Yuan has found out his secret liaison with Lady Number 9? As General Yuan was recently promoted, he might have accused him of high treason and the charge was accepted!"

"Rubbish!"

"He shouldn't have touched her, for his career's sake and for your sake. I brought her to Peking from Shanghai, and because I vowed not to marry any other woman than you, I gave her up in favour of General Yuan."

"Please don't say such things to me any more."

"But you must know that I am always devoted to you, no matter what has happened and whatever is to happen . . ."

"Silence!" she said angrily. "Everything is over

between us. It's all our . . . our . . . it's entirely your father who caused all the trouble!"

She was on the point of going much further, but suddenly checked herself. She thought of her mother, whom she seemed to see, standing before her, dressed in a grey Buddhist robe, with a rosary in her hand and with eyes full of tears, telling her to be silent. She looked into the infinite space outside the window and murmured:

"Oh, my Mother, my poor Mother!"

"I live in the First Lane of Incense Burner Camps
If you think I can be of help to you in any way, let me know . . ."

She did not hear his words. He saw it was no use to remain there any longer, made a deep bow and went off without further ado.

When he was gone, she tried her best to calm down and think what was to be done. First of all, she must see Yuan, and to his residence she went immediately. The house seemed to be quiet and serene, and the porter told her that the master was in Tientsin. She had to ask to see the mistress of the house.

Lady Number 9 received her coldly and was more interested in examining the clothes her visitor was wearing, how her hair was done and how a girl without any make-up and so plainly dressed could look so lovely, than she was concerned about Ta Tung's arrest.

"Mrs. Li, as the arrest was made in our residence, you must realise that if there had been anything we could do for him, we would have done so without your asking us. My Lord has gone to Tientsin on urgent business. Even if he were here, what could he do against the charge of high treason and the carrying out of an Imperial Edict? Besides, Mr. Li is a very proud and aloof person, nobody could get within five feet of him. We really didn't know

what was in his mind. I sympathise with you, but have nothing to say for him."

Such chilly words left no doubt that she would not lift a finger for Ta Tung. Whether Yuan was really in Tientsin or merely avoiding her was difficult to say, but she now knew she must go elsewhere for help. Coming out of Yuan's house, she lost no time in going to see Mr. and Mrs. Wen. In her dire distress she did not ask herself whether she should take Lady Number 9's words at their face value and accept the story that Ta Tung was arrested on the charge of high treason, or whether to give credit to Shiao Ming's insinuation and believe that Ta Tung had incurred Yuan's jealousy and anger. All that was occupying her mind was the one thing: how to get him out?

Just as she had feared, both Mr. and Mrs. Wen were out, and even their only servant was evidently not in. What was she to do?

Feeling that Heaven was crumbling and earth quaking and the sun darkening, she groped her way to Mr. and Mrs. Yung's house. If she could not find them, she thought, she must go to the Forbidden Palace to see the Emperor.

When Mrs. Yung greeted her with open arms and sympathetic looks, she knew she had now come to the right place, but she also realised that Ta Tung's case must be very serious. Like a little girl seeking her mother's arms when in distress, she remained there sobbing while Mrs. Yung held her tenderly.

"My dear Lotus Fragrance, don't worry yourself more than is necessary. Of course we'll do everything we can to help him. My husband, being a naturalised American citizen, is at the moment seeing the American Minister in Peking, to ask him to use his influence to set them free. If money can be of service in this case, be it ten or

twenty thousand taels, or even fifty or a hundred thousand, we will not grudge it. I've been losing heavily at Mahjong lately, and we'll consider that I've lost all that. We simply must save their lives "

"Save their lives?"

"Yes. Quite a number of them were arrested. If my husband weren't an American citizen, I would have been no better off than you are."

"Is it the Reform movement after all, isn't it?"

"Of course. What else could it be? But the bloody Empress Dowager calls it high treason."

"I can't see why they should be arrested for trying to save the country by reform."

"But the Empress Dowager can. If the Reform policy is put into practice, she can no longer hold the whole Empire in the hollow of her hand. She'll be powerless. And if she is powerless, most possibly she'll be in a very dangerous position."

"Ta Tung never breathed a word about this to me."

"But I thought he never did anything without consulting you first."

"Yes, but in small matters only, never in anything important. He is a very obstinate man. After all, a man must depend upon his firm resolution to achieve great deeds. We can't judge men or things by their success or failure."

Late in the afternoon Mr. Yung returned with the news that not only had most of the Reform leaders and followers been arrested, but also that the Young Emperor was imprisoned at the Ocean Terrace, a tiny island in the South Sea of the Winter Palace. He had been to the American Legation, but the American Minister was not in Peking Li Ti-Mo-Tai, who had come a few days ago for a special audience to be granted by the Emperor, had been to the British Legation and was curtly told that the British

Minister was on his way back from his interrupted holiday in Pei-Tai-Ho, and that in any case they could not possibly interfere in China's home politics. Unless the Empress Dowager had murdered the Emperor, which was the rumour at the moment, they could not do anything. Some of China's friends might have heartfelt sympathy with reformers, but could offer them nothing except moral support

In fact, but for the Empress Dowager and some diehard ministers, the whole country was practically in support of this movement. The young Emperor was very keen on it. He knew he was unable to cope with his aunt, who had already disposed of two Emperors and put him on the throne as a puppet. Reform, and with it a Constitution, would be a god-send to protect his people as well as himself from her. When the movement had been brought to a head he had determined to do whatever was in his power to adopt it. On the advice of the reformers he issued Edict after Edict in pursuance of the Reform policy, and established a number of new and useful organisations. He had also abolished a large number of useless and obsolete Yamen, and that proved to be a fatal blow in two respects. It was fatal to the opponents of the movement because it threw most of the good-for-nothing Manchurian officials out of their jobs, and fatal to the reformers themselves because it drove their opponents to unite in a resolve to take drastic and deadly vengeance.

The Court intrigues went on, and on the morning of that fatal day, the 6th of the 8th moon of the 24th year of Kwang Hsu (September 21st, 1898), when His Majesty went to bid the Empress Dowager good morning, a custom he piously kept up, he was told that Her Majesty had already gone to his private Palace and desired him to wait for her return. As this sounded strange, he asked the

eunuchs what was wrong He could clearly see that there was something amiss in the atmosphere.

"You should know it yourself, Your Majesty!" said one The Emperor was not much of a figure in the eyes of the followers of the Empress Dowager. They all knew whom they should respect and fear, and whom they should not

"If Viceroy Jung Lu had not come from Tientsin and warned the Old Buddha, we should probably all have died at your hands or those of the reformers, Your Majesty," remarked another coldly.

"Shut up!" said a third. " If the Old Buddha gets to know that you have been talkative, your head won't be on your shoulders long, reform or no reform "

Feeling as if a bucket of cold water had been poured on his head, the Emperor stood there trembling all over. He tried to think, and tried hard, but he could not concentrate. Although his feet were planted solidly on the ground, his soul was actually soaring higher and higher, until he felt he was far above the palace roofs Then he would fall again, not to the ground but still in mid-air, and then begin to soar higher once more. He kept on feeling like this for a while, when suddenly he was brought to the ground with a bang—he heard someone whisper:

"The Old Buddha has come back."

He was still in a state of semi consciousness, but he could see a pair of small triangular eyes looking steadily at him Though he was very familiar with this pair of eyes, he never failed to feel his heart in his mouth whenever he saw them. The piercing eyes were so sharp that they pinned him to the ground He could not soar again

At a casual glance, Her Majesty the Empress Dowager, Tzu Hsi, was not a formidable person. She was of medium stature, but for a woman of the North she was small Her well-proportioned features rendered her quite pretty even now, when she was well over sixty. She must have been

extremely lovely when young. That again was puzzling. For one can hardly associate loveliness with awe. Yet her appearance—her well-tailored and beautiful silk dresses, her well-prepared toilet, exquisitely rouged and powdered face, carefully coiffured hair—never inspired people with warmth and friendliness. In her presence women felt uncomfortable and men felt cold.

She had an attractive musical voice, but her words were never reassuring.

"I found in your rooms, among other interesting papers and books, a set of works by our loyal Marquis Tseng Kuo-Fang. I don't think you have read any of them. However, that is no matter. Come." She turned to a maid. "Give me the book. Here, I have marked this page." She opened the book and indicated the page. "Give it to the Emperor. I want you to read this couplet for me."

The Emperor received the book with both hands. Though it was handed to him by a maid, he had to regard it as something received direct from the Empress Dowager. To use only one hand would be an unpardonable crime.

The couplet referred to was introduced by a short note saying it was written to pay homage to the late wet nurse of the Marquis. The two lines were very carefully composed so as to run perfectly parallel:

"As even the charity of a free meal should always be remembered, and you, with your motherly cares, worries, embraces and hugs, were practically my mother, except for the lack of the period of gestation for me of ten months;

"How could the reward of ten thousand gold pieces be considered as sufficient, while I, with my filial piety, duty, conscience and reason, being almost your son, should be weeping with tears of blood for you for three years!"

The Emperor read it and remained silent.

"The Marquis's humble nurse was a more fortunate

woman than I. I have nursed you for nearly thirty years, educated you, given you wife and concubines, put you on the Dragon Throne, and now you want to get rid of me with the help of Yuan Shih-kai's new army."

The Emperor remained silent.

"You idiot! To-day I'm gone, to-morrow you won't be here!"

The Emperor remained silent.

"What have you to say?"

The Emperor remained silent.

"Nurse a tiger, and when it grows up it will kill you I thought I had been nursing a lamb, yet it turns out to be a tiger who tries to kill me." She lifted her exquisite hand slightly and said to her eunuchs "Come!"

Four eunuchs came forward, two taking hold of the Emperor by the hands while two stood behind him. They seemed to know exactly what she wanted. Evidently they had received previous instructions

There was not the slightest struggle. The Emperor remained silent.

"Go," she said quietly but sharply, with a graceful wave of her uplifted hand towards the door

Still remaining silent, the Emperor was taken to his island prison

With the very head of the Reform movement carefully disposed of, she then gave orders to wipe out the rest All the city gates of Peking were closed for the day and martial law was declared The train leaving for Tientsin was stopped and searched In spite of such thorough measures, the two leading "rebels", as they were called, Kang Yu-Wei and Liang Chuh-Chao, were still at large. Kang had left Peking on the last train for Tientsin and then sailed south, while Liang was seeking sanctuary at the Japanese Legation. Quite a few people had got wind of the danger and escaped, and Wen Tin-Shih left the

capital early in the morning. A number of arrests were nevertheless made, and Ta Tung was one of them. He was sent to the big prison of the Board of Punishments where all state prisoners were confined.

As soon as Lotus Fragrance learned the true situation, she decided to return to the Guild Hostel, where she said she would make her headquarters to work for the release of Ta Tung. She knew she could do almost nothing, but she would not give up hope, and did not wish to be a burden to the Yungs. All the residents in the Guild Hostel were concerned about her and Ta Tung, except Mr Cheng, who had already disappeared. Ting Ho-San had heard some most disheartening rumours which were in circulation in the capital. He said that those arrested had been accused of poisoning the Emperor with foreign pills, and that they would be punished by the execution of all their families for nine generations in all, that is four generations above themselves and four generations below themselves, together with their own generation extending as far as fourth cousins. After he had said this he realised his words were not at all helpful, so he offered to go and see Mr. Sun Chia-Nai, the President of Peking University, an influential official who might help the reformers.

When the Great Official came back from his Yamen and heard of the arrest of Ta Tung, he also came over to comfort Lotus Fragrance.

"Mrs. Li, you are a clever woman and should not grieve over such an unfortunate fate befalling your husband. To play the game of high treason is very risky. If a man succeeds, he will become a great hero, and if he fails he has to pay the penalty. Since it hasn't turned out right, and he didn't escape in time, you must regard his life as being entirely at the mercy of his enemy. I'd like to help you. If it were an ordinary matter, no doubt I might be able to use my influence with some great officials. But since it

is a general suppression of the reform rebels, there is no use my doing anything. I hear that General Yuan has escaped to Tientsin and hidden in a Foreign Concession. He will be in disgrace. A man of position like him should not join the rebels."

The old Uncle was very sorry for the young couple, and he bought some pears and grapes to give to Lotus Fragrance. He said

"My worthy niece, here are some fruits your elder uncle has bought for you. Take care of yourself and have some pears and grapes. Send some to the prison for my worthy nephew to-morrow. Tell him that if he had listened to my advice and had gone back instead of associating with these horrible people, he would not be in prison."

Ting Ho-San came back by nightfall. He looked depressed.

"Could not find Mr. Sun Chia-Nai or anybody else. Closing down the University to-morrow. Know not what to do myself. Willing to go into prison in place of Ta Tung."

Lotus Fragrance thanked him for his kindness, but said that could not be done.

Mrs Hou had cooked for Lotus Fragrance, but she didn't eat a morsel the whole day. She continued to shed tears in silence. Mrs Hou stayed with her to keep her company at night.

For eight days no official news could be obtained. Lotus Fragrance went to the big prison every morning, but her request to see her husband for only a moment was always refused. Various rumours spread far and wide, and whenever they reached her ears, she refused to believe them. Nevertheless, she felt she was like an ant in a hot oven, and could not have a moment's peace of mind. Her bed seemed to be covered with a mat of bristles and her chair with a cushion of needles and her food tasted like earth

and mud. She had scarcely any rest and ate very little. Her eyes began to sink and look black. Mrs. Yung came to see her almost every day, but she and her husband failed even to obtain permission for the wives of the state prisoners to visit the forbidden jail. Each day passed away as slowly as a year.

On the morning of the 13th the sky was full of dark clouds, and soon rain was pouring down. News came that an execution of many reform rebels had been carried out at The Bridge of Heaven. Some people who had seen it said that one of the victims was a young man who went to his death in the heroic spirit of a martyr. Just before he was executed, he shouted to the official who was in charge of the execution "You may kill me, but will never kill this movement. One falls and a hundred will rise after him."

When Lotus Fragrance heard this she trembled. She had been to The Bridge of Heaven in Peking. She knew it was a dry place and not really a bridge over a river. She remembered vaguely that some one had said that a fortuneteller had predicted that Ta Tung would die in a place where there should be water but actually there was no water. That dreadful prophecy must have come true. As they repeated the dying words of the young victim, she cried:

"Oh, my Ta Tung!"

She felt as if she had burst into a thousand pieces and every piece was hanging in mid-air. Everything began to whirl around her and soon she could neither see nor hear. Finally her senses completely fled, and she fainted.

By the time she came to herself and opened her eyes again, she saw, standing in front of her bed and holding her hand, none other than her beloved husband, Ta Tung.

CHAPTER XII

*"The clamour of a thousand tongues produces mighty sound,
And a million minds will form a wall of will around"*

PEOPLE praise the principle of "presenting charcoal to those who are shivering in the snow", but they adhere to the practice of "adding embroidery on the surface of brocade". When the Emperor Kwang Hsu and his supporters were imprisoned and the Reform movement was crushed by the Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi, almost none of the mandarins of influence would stretch out a helping hand to anyone who was unfortunate enough to be involved in it. Mr. and Mrs. Yung realised, and Lotus Fragrance feared, that to get Ta Tung or any other of the captured reformers out of prison nothing short of a miracle was required. Mr. and Mrs. Yung also realised, and Lotus Fragrance also feared, that in the nineteenth century no miracle was likely to happen.

But actually several extraordinary events, which could almost be regarded as miracles, had already happened within a few days. First, General Yuan Shih-Kai, the most ardent and powerful supporter of the Reform movement, as well as the most outspoken and loyal follower of the young Emperor, had been allowed his freedom while his fellow conspirators were arrested. Secondly, instead of having, as he always did, his holidays in Peking and working hard in Tientsin where his Yamen was, Yuan had, at the beginning of the coup d'état, gone to Tientsin for a few days rest. And lastly, when he returned to Peking after his short holiday in Tientsin, and heard that Ta Tung was imprisoned for a capital offence, he went immediately to the authorities and had him discharged in the twinkling of an eye.

Nobody really knew why Yuan decided so promptly to get Ta Tung released except Lady Number 9, who was

one of the few women able to speak with their eyebrows and hear with their eyes. When she told her husband that she had had to tolerate the unbearable visit of the wife of that insolent young rebel, he exclaimed:

"The woman must be full of nerve! She wanted me to help her husband when he had committed such a serious offence?"

"Poor woman! I don't think she knew anything about it until I told her a little. Evidently he had kept her in the dark . . ."

"Seems to be a stupid woman?"

"No, on the contrary!"

"Em' A man who can keep a secret from his intelligent wife is very rare."

Yuan was silent for a second and Lady Number 9 knew that she had unwittingly saved a life.

On the 13th, when it was known in the big prison of the Board of Punishments that an execution was to take place on that day, and that seven prisoners, of whom Ta Tung was one, had been called out of their cells, it seemed that his life had been already forfeited. But while the other six were conducted to a place called "the preparation room" to be bound and labelled for the fatal occasion, Ta Tung was led before the jailer. This small official had suddenly become an extremely amiable person and he told Ta Tung that someone with great influence in Court had obtained his pardon from the Empress Dowager Ta Tung was made to sign a kind of repentant paper, which, the jailer said, was merely a matter of formality. This obliging official then congratulated him on his extraordinary good fortune and bade him farewell. When gate after gate of the big prison was opened to let him pass, and when finally he found himself standing outside the main entrance, he could scarcely believe that he was not dreaming.

Neither could Lotus Fragrance believe that she was not dreaming. For her his release and return had transformed their little room into the Ninth Heaven. And to crown her happiness, a most sumptuous feast was sent to the Guild Hostel by order of General Yuan Shih-kai. The arrival of the feast left no doubt in their minds that Yuan was the man who had got Ta Tung released. As Lotus Fragrance was very anxious to celebrate his unexpected homecoming, and as she herself was unable to cook because she was still rather weak, this timely present was doubly welcome. It seemed to her that Yuan was not only very thoughtful, but also very courteous. In a short note accompanying this banquet he apologised for being unable to perform his duty in person, as a host should do, because several previous engagements prevented him from so doing. He had therefore to "move his wine pots and cups away from his house to that of his guest of honour, whose instructions he was very anxious to hear." He hoped this utterly unpalatable repast would serve to "allay the fear" which Ta Tung might have suffered while detained in prison.

Ta Tung seemed insensible to the honour which Yuan had showered upon him. Had Lotus Fragrance not stopped him in time, he would have refused to accept the feast. He said that while the other reformers had become victims of the persecution, he ought not to enjoy himself. However, when the appetising-looking dishes were served, his hunger became more acute than he could bear. For eight days past he had not had a decent meal. As he began to tell her what Yuan had done to the cause of reform, he gradually forgot about his resolve not to touch the food given to him by a man who was, he said, no less than a traitor. His chopsticks became more and more busy and finally he could not finish a single sentence without swallowing two or three pieces of food first.

When the reformers had felt that they were sure to meet with stout reaction against the movement, they knew that without military backing they were as good as doomed. The young Emperor was less than a mere figurehead. The Empress Dowager was retired in name only. Everything was still in the hollow of her hand. He was not only powerless, but also extremely weak and timid. Whenever his powerful aunt raised her little finger, he would tremble. Among the supporters of the movement Yuan had been their only hope. A strong man with a well-equipped army stationed quite near the capital, he must take an active part in a coup d'état in order to forestall any action likely to be staged by their opposers. There had been numerous conferences at night in Kang's and Liang's place, and that was why Ta Tung had always been late in coming home. After they had succeeded in persuading the Emperor to give Yuan rapid promotion, it was decided that the Empress Dowager must be rendered powerless, that the Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province, Jung Lu, who was her nephew as well as her henchman, must be arrested, executed and replaced by Yuan. On the night of the 3rd they discussed and planned this in detail at Yuan's residence until 3 o'clock in the following morning.

Although he was Jung Lu's former subordinate, Yuan's assurances to the reformers and his allegiance to the sovereign had left no doubt in anyone's mind. Since he had been promoted to a rank equal to and independent of Jung Lu, it was natural to assume that his protestations were genuine. On the occasion of his last Audience with the Emperor on the morning of the 5th, his words had sounded as if they came from the bottom of his heart. He vowed that he would support His Majesty to the last drop of his blood, that even were his liver and brain trampled on the ground, he would not regard himself as

having shown sufficient gratitude to His Majesty. To rush into water or fire, he added, he needed but a word from His Majesty. While he was gone to Tientsin, there, he said, to consolidate his military arrangements, Jung Lu came to Peking secretly and brought the Empress Dowager into the Forbidden City from the Summer Palace. If Yuan had not betrayed them, who else could have done it? And now six of the reform leaders had been executed and many others were still in prison. The future of China was darker than ever.

"I'm partly to blame for bringing you to Peking and consequently into the reform movement. Formerly you were more inclined to follow Dr. Sun Yat-Sen in his revolution than to follow Mr. Kang Yu-Wei in his reform. You used to say that reform was not enough."

"With Yuan's ardent support, it looked as if we could overcome any obstacle in our way. Reform, after all, is better than no reform. Who would have thought Yuan to be a man with two faces!"

"I would. He who is too ready to say sweet words is likely to give you some bitter disappointment. Besides, Yuan is an old hand at politics, and had certainly put in the balance his personal advantages and disadvantages. He must have asked himself first: 'What do I gain or lose if I stick to the reformers, and what do I gain or lose if I play them false?' The answer was simple. If he stuck to the movement, he would get promotion or lose his neck. But if he betrayed them, he would get promotion all the same, the only difference being that it would come from the Empress Dowager instead of the Emperor. And there was no risk of his losing anything . . ."

"How about his honour?"

"That he had to lose in either case. By sticking to the reformers he was, in the eyes of the conservatives, betraying his former superior, Jung Lu. However, that

was no matter. No official regards his honour as more important than a feather. Yuan is a discreet man, he must play for safety first. Like the notorious Prime Minister Tsao Tsao, he thinks it 'safer to betray the whole world than to leave any possibility that someone may betray me'. You should have thought of that."

"We only thought of the future of the country."

"It is not because I like to prophesy on a thing after it has happened, but you should not have kept the whole business so dark from me. Sometimes an outsider, being aloof from entanglements, can have a cooler and clearer view of the whole thing than those who are involved deeply in it."

"You seem to understand Yuan better than any of us. Why should he take the trouble to get me out of prison?"

"That I cannot say at the moment. But the sending of the feast so promptly is a clear sign that he wants you to know who rescued you from prison. It is obvious he has designs on you. When a man tries to bribe you with favours, beware!"

"He is very simple-minded if he thinks that I can be bribed while my comrades were beheaded."

"He is, if he stops at this."

While Ta Tung was consuming Yuan's dinner rapidly, Lotus Fragrance was scarcely eating anything. She said now that she was reminded of the sufferers in this political storm she had almost completely lost her appetite. She could not help shedding a few tears, which, she said, came from thinking of the wives and children of those reformers who had become martyrs on that day.

Later in the evening Ting Ho-San came back and learned from Mrs. Hou that Ta Tung was released. He rushed over to greet his friend.

"Never thought would see you again, Ta Tung."

"I also never thought that I would be spared."

"Not only that. Going away to-morrow Won't be able to see you if you come out to-morrow."

"Going away so suddenly? Are you also on the black list?"

"Don't know. Might be on it. Going away just as well No more university Nothing doing here At the execution to-day Most horrible! At a students' mass meeting afterwards. Hundreds present. Interrupted by Guards Decided to go to Canton Joining the revolutionaries"

"Tell me, are many people going with you?"

"Thousands! But not with me. From every part of the country. Thousands and tens of thousands. Have only one voice. 'Down with the Manchus!' Have only one aim. 'Rebirth of China!' May not see it in our time, but must have a try. Many others following us if we fail"

"It takes time, but will never fail"

"Will come to Peking again if we succeed"

"Where will you go if you fail, Mr. Ting?" Lotus Fragrance put in

"Be a fisherman, on a deserted island Off the coast of Hai-An South-most mainland of China. Most picturesque place in the world. Beautifully mild all the year around. Paradise on earth. No society, no law, no officials there Believed by the people in neighbouring districts to be haunted. Nobody dares to stay there. Most silly nonsense. Was once there when a boy. Went by a self-made raft Stayed for a week. Lived on fruits and fish. Slept in a cave. Much more thrilling than the life of an immortal. Parents searched everywhere Severely beaten when they found me at last."

"It must be a divine place."

"Well worth being beaten. Farewell, both of you. Have to do some packing"

And he darted out of the room

Ta Tung was silent. Lotus Fragrance watched his

expression for a while.

"That island is the place for you, Ta Tung."

"Yes. But I will go there only if the Manchus are overthrown."

"If you fail to do that, then where do you go?"

"Nowhere, but try again and again until they are overthrown."

Before they retired, another caller was announced. Mr Yung, hearing that Ta Tung was released, came to visit the young couple. He was extremely glad to see Ta Tung again but very sorry to know that Lotus Fragrance was not feeling well. He much regretted that his wife was unable to come and see her because she was detained at a Mahjong party.

Knowing that Mr. Yung had done everything humanly possible to help the imprisoned reformers, Ta Tung thanked him and asked him what was likely to happen to the others.

"Things are very bad at present. Besides those six comrades who have sacrificed their lives for the cause to-day, many others will be banished to the border provinces or degraded for life. Kang was nearly caught in Shanghai. Luckily the British Consul there helped him and sent him to Hongkong immediately. Liang was smuggled out of Peking with the help of the Japanese Legation and is now on his way to Japan. I don't know where the Wens are. All the rest are either hiding in foreign concessions in Tientsin, waiting for an opportunity to get away, or else have already escaped to the South. You are the only reformer still near the tiger's mouth. My advice to you is, get away from here while there is still a chance to do so."

"But where to?"

"To Japan, to join Liang, or to Hongkong to join Kang . . ."

"If I can get to Hongkong, there is another organisation which I should like to join . . ."

"Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Shin Chung Hui, the Association for the Rebirth of China?"

Ta Tung did not answer. His silence was his assent

"I met him two years ago in New York. He is the best speaker I've ever heard. Some people laughed at him and nicknamed him Sun, the Big Gun, thinking he brags too much. But I believe in him. He told me that a reform was not sufficient to save China. If I had followed his advice, I would not have come to Peking. When I arrived in Hongkong he was still in London. Then my wife was ill, the climate there not agreeing with her. So when she came out of hospital we sailed north, to join the reform movement. I think he is still abroad, also in Japan, at present . . ."

"Who is in charge of the Association while he is away?"

"A Mr. Yang, from Fukien, is the nominal president of the Association. He makes his headquarters in Hongkong. The place is disguised as a trading company called Chien Han Hong, in Stanton Street, and it is an open secret that all revolutionary young men are welcome there. The British Authorities tolerate them as long as they do not disturb the public safety of the port. If you have decided to join them, go at once. And if you mention me as your friend, you'll find it will help."

"Things are easier said than done"

"If your difficulty is the question of money, please don't worry at all. I'm not quite broke yet . . ."

"I can't accept money from you. I shall not be able to pay you back at all. Besides, my wife isn't quite well."

"Nothing serious," Lotus Fragrance said. "I'll be better soon"

"Then you need money urgently. Let me see what I

have with me." As he took out a small pile of notes from his pocket-book, he continued in a joking tone. "You don't know how much I wish you could let my wife have some of your wife's malady as easily as I can let you have some of my money. What a pity that one can't borrow a little sickness now and then from one's friends. In the spring, when my wife wasn't quite well, she had to stay in a hospital for several weeks. And that saved me more than three thousand taels. Doctors and nurses and other fees only cost me seven or eight hundred taels, but she was unable to play Mahjong or to go out shopping for two months. I always consider myself extremely fortunate if she doesn't lose more than two thousand a month."

In spite of Ta Tung's strong, and Lotus Fragrance's mild protests, he left some five hundred taels in notes with them, bid them good-night and went away.

"There is nothing to stop you now, Ta Tung," Lotus Fragrance said resolutely. "I knew you would like to join Mr. Ting if you had sufficient money, and now Mr. Yung has provided it."

"But you can't travel at present . . ."

"I'm not going. 'A man's ambition is not limited by space' and every dutiful wife should try not to be a burden to her husband's career. I'm not the sort of woman who can't bear to leave her man for a short while, or even for a longer period, and I believe the Manchu regime can't last much longer. Perhaps very soon we shall be able to meet on that deserted island off the coast of Hai-An."

"If I join the revolutionaries I shall not be able to support you, and the money we have won't last long."

"It is rather ironical that while you were trying to overthrow the Empress Dowager, I have been trying to get into her service. You must have heard that she considers herself a very artistic person and likes to paint and draw. She has recently engaged a very good lady artist, Mrs.

Miao, from the South, to supervise the repainting of all the court lamps in the Forbidden and Summer Palaces. All the painters in the lantern and lamp shops outside Chien-Men have been invited to submit their work and only a few of them were qualified. As more artists are wanted, they have been trying everywhere to get more. My style seems to have met with the approval of Mrs. Miao, so it has been arranged that they will accept my painting. They pay a tael apiece, and it doesn't take me a day to do one. Thousands of lamps and lanterns have to be renewed every few months, so our income is assured for some time to come—of course, provided you people do not overthrow her too soon."

"When have you been doing these things? I didn't know at all."

"Of course you didn't. It was a secret, and my pictures were submitted under my maiden name. Anyway, you have been paying too much attention to Lady Number 9 . . . and Lady Number 9's poems!"

"You know that isn't true."

"That at least was your guise. You talked to me not about the reform, but about poetry."

"Both the reform and Lady Number 9's poems have now become an illusion, and I think your job as a painter of Court lanterns may last much longer than we like."

"In that case, it is a good policy to put a bet on both sides." Lotus Fragrance tried to smile. "If you lose on one side, you win on the other. I won't need this kind of wretched work when I can join you on that island in the South Sea."

Though it is quite a common occurrence in China for sensible young wives to send their devoted husbands far away in pursuit of their careers, and as such separation may have to last for years, it is also human that they should loathe the necessity for the heartbreakng parting. For her

sake, he would try to delay his departure, and for his sake she would urge him to go. In the case of Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance, the occasion was an urgent one, and he realised that no matter how reluctant he was to leave her, he must get away as quickly as he could. Time was pressing.

"I'll get a good physician for you," he suggested. "As soon as you are better I'll try to catch up with Ting Ho-San in Shanghai."

"No. You must go with him to-morrow. I'm actually quite healthy, apart from feeling a little sleepy and sometimes sick. I think all I am suffering from is a little lack of sleep which has perhaps resulted in a slight indigestion. It's nothing serious. I'm positively sure that I'll be well again and enjoying my food very soon. I'll never forgive myself if you fall into the tiger's mouth again because of me."

"At least I must wait until you have got a companion . . ."

"Why should I have a companion?"

"You are afraid of ghosts and this room . . ."

"No, I am not!"

"You can't deceive me. Never once have you gone into the inner room by yourself in the dark . . ."

"Well, to confess, I was—a little bit—in the beginning."

"Not a little bit!"

"So nothing really escapes your notice, though you seem to be absent-minded."

"One should know one's bedfellow. And the aghast look you had when Ting Ho-San said that a man had died in these rooms a few days before we moved in. You replied airily that you were not afraid of ghosts. No one really not afraid need say that."

"We had no choice. We had to move in even if the ghost was actually haunting the place"

"I knew and said nothing. My poor Lotus Fragrance And when I was in prison I thought of your fear of the dark . . ."

"But I am no longer afraid of being alone in the dark. Indeed, for the past few nights I've requested Mrs Hou not to bother to come and keep me company "

"How is that?"

"I don't know. I suppose it was merely a childish fear which I have now outgrown. Recently even when there was no one in the whole courtyard, I have never felt that I was alone. If you don't believe me, you go out while I stay here in the dark."

"All right. I'll go over to tell Ting Ho-San about this."

"Yes, do. It is a help to have a companion when travelling."

To test her, Ta Tung stayed a little while outside the window before he came in again from his short visit to Ting Lotus Fragrance had not lit the lamp By the dim moonlight from the window she was packing for her husband. She did not show the slightest sign of fear

There was not much to pack Travelling at this time of the year is very convenient for those who have hardly any luggage, and Ta Tung's destination, Canton, the provincial seat of Kwangtung, is a place where a single lined garment is quite sufficient to pass the coldest of winters, the weather there being warm all the year round People in the North, and even those in the Central part of China consider that there is no winter in the extreme South. A very small bundle was all that Ta Tung required and consented to carry with him, though his wife had tried in vain to induce him to take a little more. As for money, they nearly quarrelled over it. Ta Tung thought two hundred taels would be more than he needed, and Lotus Fragrance insisted that he should take the round number of five hundred with him, saying that they had some

savings and therefore she was still left with over a hundred, which she could keep to be used in case of any emergency. "Better to be hard up at home than on the road," she argued, but Ta Tung had made up his mind to leave more money for her as he was sure that for a very long time to come he would not be able to send her any money. Finally he was made to take a hundred more. She said that this was a fair arrangement, as they were practically dividing what they had between them equally, with the advantage slightly on her side.

An early autumn night is short, but that night of nights, the 13th of the 8th moon of the 24th year of Kwang Hsu, seemed to have passed away in the twinkling of an eye. Before they had said half of what they wanted to say to each other, and had hardly any sleep at all, there appeared in the east that pale colour which is commonly called "fish-white" in China. Though feeling sick, she hurriedly got up to prepare an early and substantial breakfast, in which she also asked Ting to join. Ting was the only one who enjoyed the meal.

The autumn sky was full of grey clouds, though it was not raining. Faded leaves, scattered all over the ground, produced intermittent rustling sounds as they were swept along by the gentle west wind. Even the lofty tower of the Chien-Men, which seemed hitherto indifferent to anyone passing by, greeted the young couple with a sorrowful countenance. They turned to the right and entered the East Railway Station, not daring to look at the city gate tower again.

All the third-class cars were, as usual, overcrowded. Passengers had come hours ago to occupy seats. Ting, who was leaving the capital for good, had quite a lot of luggage with him and knew not what to do. Ta Tung helped him to get all his things, one by one, into the central gangway of the train, to the great annoyance of their

fellow passengers The air in the train, while standing in the station with an overload of passengers, was stuffy and repulsive. The mildly chilly morning was developing into a close and hot day. Both Ta Tung and Ting were sweating and would have liked to get out and join Lotus Fragrance on the platform, but dared not do so for fear of losing their standing-room.

Ta Tung glanced over the interior of the car. He could see nearly a hundred people crowded together. They belonged, all of them, to the working class. They took the first train because they wanted to get to their destination early so that they could have a whole day before them to work People who lead an easier life invariably take later trains

It was the first time he had ever ridden in a train. The frequent blowing of the "steam whistle", as it was called, made his thoughts as confused as a bundle of hemp. There were a thousand and one things which he wanted to speak about to Lotus Fragrance, but he did not know with which to begin He looked at her furtively, afraid to catch her eye, and hurriedly turned his gaze away. As the time for the train to start got near, Lotus Fragrance stood below the window and stared at Ta Tung Her heart was beating rapidly and high, and she was counting each second that was flying away. How she would have liked the time to stand still for a little while for her sake! She, too, had many things to tell him, but she decided not to say any of them

When a signal man waved his green flag and blew his whistle, Lotus Fragrance nearly lost her self-control and was on the verge of tears. While some people on the platform began to make their bows and to say goodbye to those on board the train, she felt her mouth dry up and had difficulty in swallowing She was almost sick, and her nostrils were sour. In spite of herself, she exclaimed:

"Ta Tung, I want to tell you that you . . . "

A loud and long blast from the steam whistle interrupted her words and the train began to puff and move off.

"What is it, Lotus Fragrance?"

"Oh, nothing, just you must write to me very often "

"Of course."

She followed the train for a few seconds but soon could not keep pace with it. Like a great black dragon, puffing out fire and smoke, it plunged away from the station taking her beloved one with it.

Tears rolled down her cheeks when the train disappeared in the light mistiness in the distance.

General Yuan was somewhat surprised that Ta Tung had not come to thank him on the very evening of his release, but was quite sure that he would call on the following day. Indeed, he was so certain of the call that he stayed in that morning and ordered his servants to usher in Mr. Li as soon as he appeared.

Later on the servant did bring in Mr. Li. But instead of the Mr. Li whom their master was waiting for, it was the Mr. Li whom he did not wish to see. Shiao Ming, having heard the rumour that Ta Tung was pardoned, hurried to Yuan to make sure.

"So it's you, Shiao Ming. Have you heard the good news that your townsman, Ta Tung, was set free yesterday?"

"Then it *is* true!" Shiao Ming exclaimed. "How very good of Your Excellency! But, again, how very reckless of Your Excellency!"

"Pray why?"

"Because when you open your cage and let the tiger return to his mountain lair, you don't expect the beast to come within your grasp again. When you let the dragon return to his ocean home, you don't hope for the monster

to be stranded in shallow waters once more. You have done a very gracious deed, Your Excellency, but such ungrateful and dangerous people, once having slipped through your fingers, will be troublesome afterwards."

Yuan was silent and his face impassive.

Shiao Ming did not want to incur Yuan's displeasure with his good intentions He added guardedly

"After all, I'm not sure whether he has not gone already Better send someone—or preferably two or three men—to inquire And if he is still in Peking, make sure that he will come here before he leaves the capital."

"There is no necessity to despatch more than one messenger. If he is there, he will come, and if he isn't, what's the use of more men?"

Yuan had very broad shoulders When he heard from his messenger that Ta Tung was gone and that only Lotus Fragrance was there, he bore his disappointment rather philosophically. He immediately sent for Shiao Ming Giving him a thousand taels of silver in notes, Yuan said.

"I am so glad that Ta Tung finds politics disgusting, and has chosen to leave the whirlpool at the earliest opportunity. However, I am deeply concerned that he has left his wife behind, who must be in rather difficult circumstances. Will you please take this small sum of money to her for me, and tell her that if she needs any help in future, I shall be honoured if she cares to let me know?"

"Certainly, I will."

"As you are her townsman, I entrust this delicate mission to you, hoping you will do it so tactfully that she won't be offended by my interfering in her private affairs Assure her that I would have come myself had I had the honour of having met her before "

"Your Excellency is always so gracious"

Yuan was disappointed once more. Having heard that there had been a messenger enquiring after her husband,

Lotus Fragrance had left the Guild Hostel without giving anyone, so old Hou and his wife professed and even swore, her new address. Shiao Ming was very sceptical about these words. He hinted to Yuan that the woman Hou was so ready with excuses that she was sure to know where Lotus Fragrance was. He even thought that perhaps she was still hiding in the hostel. Anyway, she could not have gone very far and a careful search would doubtless find her. He said that he had left his attendant in the neighbourhood to observe the entrance to the building.

"No, Shiao Ming, order your man home," Yuan smiled "You have shown me to-day that you are a very capable person and have carried out your work very thoroughly. But in some affairs such efficiency and thoroughness are not necessary. However, I'm extremely pleased with you and will not let you go away without a handsome reward."

Fearing that Yuan would dismiss him with a monetary reward, and that possibly the thousand taels was what Yuan meant, he hurriedly spoke out his mind. He had spent over ten thousand taels on Yuan, and merely to get back a tenth of his own money was a very bad business. He was ambitious.

"No, Your Excellency. If I had been hoping to get rewards, I would have joined commercial circles. I am one of your most devoted servants and have been looking forward to serving Your Excellency in whatever humble capacity you cared to commission me. Your Excellency will find that I will never fail you."

Yuan was silent for a second, and then said with a gracious smile:

"Well, I like your devotion, and as I said, I know you are a young man who goes about his work with efficiency and thoroughness. I much regret I have no decent commission for you at the moment. But there is a small vacancy as aide-de-camp to be filled, and if you

don't think that is too humiliating for you, may I ask you to condescend?"

"I am greatly honoured, Your Excellency." He made repeated bows to Yuan. "And thank you very much for the commission."

"I'll wire Tientsin to send you the official papers for the appointment, but I want you to stay in Peking with me for the time being."

"Your servant will be grateful to you if he is privileged by being allowed to attend upon such an immortal figure in history."

Yuan was flattered. Smiling at Shiao Ming, he said

"I was unfortunate in losing a capable Kiangsi man, but on the other hand am fortunate enough to enlist the services of another Kiangsi man who, I think, is at least more sensible."

"And more loyal, Your Excellency."

Ta Tung never dreamt that his escape from Peking would result in the realisation of Shiao Ming's ambition. In point of fact, he had tried on several occasions to put in a good word for Shiao Ming with Yuan. On his train journey to Tientsin, as he stood in the crowded train looking listlessly at the blank expressions of his fellow passengers, his thoughts were on Lotus Fragrance; and once or twice they strayed from her to Shiao Ming. He much regretted that he had not succeeded in recommending him to Yuan before the coup d'état. Perhaps there was a little selfishness in his concern about his foster-brother. He thought that if he had secured a good post for Shiao Ming, it would mean less trouble and worry for Lotus Fragrance.

At Tientsin they made enquiries at the ticket agencies for steamers going South. Two boats were due to sail for Shanghai that night, one belonging to the China Merchant

Navigation Company and the other to an English company. As the Chinese boat was bigger and faster, and the passage money slightly cheaper, they naturally wanted to buy tickets for this one. They were told that five classes existed on board these steamers. The first class was called "Saloon" or Foreigners' class. Barbarians from Great Britain or of "The Striped Banner" and other foreigners generally travelled by this class, and they were served with barbarian meals. The next class was called "Mandarin's Cabins" and was served with good Chinese food, as Chinese officials always preferred. The third class was called "Private Cabins", most favoured by merchants, and the meals consisted of three meat and three vegetable dishes. The fourth was called "General Cabin", in which all the passengers stayed in one big room, with their berths or bunks linked to each other. The fifth was called "Canopy class", which was equal to steerage, and where the passengers were made to sleep wherever, in the passages and corridors, or even on the open deck, a space could be found without obstructing the thoroughfare. Those in these two classes were supplied with no other food than plain coarse rice twice a day.

The open deck sounded a little too risky for Ta Tung and Ting, so they both agreed to travel in the General Cabin. The man, while filling up their tickets, remarked casually that, seeing they were novices in "travelling over rivers and lakes", he hoped they were not smokers of foreign medicine (opium was generally called foreign medicine) nor Mahjong players who did not realise that these things were forbidden on this ship, while utter freedom was allowed on others. He candidly confessed that as the English company allowed a better commission to the ticket agencies, he wanted to exploit every possibility of making a little more money.

"Why the difference?" Ting was curious.

"Because this is a Chinese ship and therefore subject to the laws of China. Soldiers and policemen may go on board at any time. The other ship belongs to Great Britain and the people of Great Britain do not care what we do on board."

"Are not Chinese people subject to Chinese laws once they are on board an English ship?" Ta Tung asked.

"No. Great Britain does not allow interference by Chinese soldiers or policemen."

"But the ship is sailing in Chinese waters!"

"That may be. But Great Britain does not care!"

Ting was bursting with anger.

"Stop your 'Great'. You are Chinese, aren't you?"

"Of course." The man could not understand why Ting was angry. "Otherwise I wouldn't bother by which ship you go."

"We'll change our mind and travel by the other ship," Ta Tung said to the man with a smile.

"What!" Ting exclaimed.

"Two General Cabin tickets for the English ship, please."

"One only!" protested Ting. "Am not going on a small English boat! Not me!"

"I like a pipe of opium now and again and my friend is a Mahjong devotee."

"No!"

"My friend is a patriot and he'd rather risk being arrested than patronise a foreign ship. Do the soldiers and policemen sometimes arrest passengers because they have broken the law?"

"They have detained quite a few passengers for no reason at all. They said they were suspected of being 'reform rebels,'" the man replied.

"Are they really reform rebels?"

"What if they are 'reformers'?" Reform is no rebellion,

and I'd rather see a rebellion than the old woman leading the country to ruination."

"Beware what you say. It's high treason."

"Not in Great Britain's Concession!"

Ting was silent. He saw the man was a patriot like himself, but he could not understand why he must use the word "Great" every time he mentioned Britain.

As soon as they had obtained their tickets, they took the train for Tangku and went on board the English steamer immediately. They saw that, not far away, the Chinese ship was docked, with a lot of men in uniforms on the wharf. They felt very grateful to the man at the ticket agency, who was evidently trying to warn them.

Yes, the man had been very truthful. Nobody on board the English ship cared what was happening among the passengers. People were making their beds everywhere and anywhere, and in the general cabin, for a berth in which they had had to pay extra money to the stewards, some travellers were smoking opium. They had thought the air in the train was bad, but that in the general cabin was a thousand times worse. A steward, seeing that they could not endure the smell of opium, suggested that they could occupy as berths the big couch in the drawing-room of the private cabins, for which they need only pay a little more tip. He added that passengers in the private cabins were more respectable and there was no smell of opium in the drawing-room. This suggestion was accepted with alacrity, and they immediately settled themselves comfortably on the big couch in the drawing-room.

Their choice was not a very wise one. Though they had escaped the smell of opium, they had come into close contact with the noise of Mahjong. As soon as the ship had started, a table was laid for Mahjong in the drawing-room, and four merchants, who were occupying private cabins,

played the game incessantly. As the next day was the Mid-Autumn Festival, they played through the whole night until morning. Ta Tung and Ting could not sleep at all.

A young steward who was now attending on them was very sympathetic, and placed two deck chairs for them to rest a little in a comparatively quiet corner near the comprador's office. He said that the early morning was the only time when the noise was less, for most of the boisterous people on board were fast asleep. When luncheon was about to be served, the whole ship began to assume the atmosphere of a country fair. Everywhere was crowded with busy and happy people who were either drinking, smoking, talking, laughing, singing, quarrelling or gambling. The only way of finding a little tranquillity was to go up to the boatdeck, of which a very small part was allotted as a breathing space for the Chinese passengers. Not many people frequented this place, and by leaning over the balustrade and looking at the sky or the sea, one could avoid some of the bustling noise on the steamer.

While the whole ship was having a very gay time during the Mid-Autumn Festival, Ta Tung and Ting passed the day almost in silence. For three days and three nights they spent most of their time on the boat deck, where they had made a few friends. Though they were very cautious themselves, and never dared to hint about politics first, the conversation always drifted to the reform and the recent coup d'état, and everyone they talked with invariably expressed his strong dislike of the present Government. It seemed that on board an English ship everybody was having his fling of freedom, and never hesitated to speak out his mind aloud.

When it had been more or less discovered that they were political refugees escaping from the persecution in

Peking, they found, to their surprise, that the young steward was a member of the revolutionary association which they wanted to join. When he was not busy on duty he joined them on the boatdeck and, keeping in a secluded corner, told them that most of the members of the various secret societies in Shanghai and other ports of the Yangtze River, had gradually become affiliated members of the revolutionary Shin Chung Hui, that many of them had vowed to kill all the great Manchu officials whenever there was a chance, and that there were tens and hundreds of thousands of them all along the Yangtze Valley. Knowing them to have no friends in Shanghai, he recommended them to stay at a small hotel in the French Concession. They arrived at Shanghai towards dusk on the fourth day.

Shanghai, termed "a stretch of ten li of foreign fields" in China, was famous for its glistening and dazzling splendour. The busy port was lit with a million sparkling electric lights. From the distance it looked as if the ship were approaching fairyland. As they came nearer, they saw the Whampoo river was half-packed with steamers, junks and small launches and boats, and the Bund was littered with men and vehicles. As the ship was docking, hundreds of porters and inn agents dashed on board, pushing each other to get ahead. Greetings, shouts, oaths and laughter were issuing from every side. The whole ship practically resembled Hell let loose. The stewards had promptly locked all the doors of the drawing-room of the private cabins, and the knocking, kicking, pushing and forcing of the doors continued for some time without anyone inside taking any notice of them. Inside the barred windows, Ta Tung and some of his fellow passengers watched in silence. For half an hour the tumult went on, and when the commotion began to sub-

side, the young steward got someone to carry Ting's luggage and took them ashore.

On the wharf, men were still very busy. Stevedores, half-naked and carrying heavy and bulky sacks and boxes from the ship, moved slowly and cautiously along, grunting aloud their songs of burden in a peculiar droning voice. A few score of feet further away, on the beautifully paved road, carriages dashed to and fro as quickly as flowing streams, and horses ran up and down as spiritedly as prancing dragons. Never had they seen such a picture of prosperity and opulence before. Richly dressed and beautifully groomed Europeans and Chinese, mostly gentlemen, with a few ladies, rode or walked along in such high spirits that one could scarcely realise that there were miseries in human lives in this wonderful world. Ta Tung's heart ached when he passed the scene of such utter suffering and wretchedness, and a moment later, only a stone's-throw from there, this blissful vision of splendour and happiness.

Passing along these spacious boulevards, which smelt very pleasant, he gradually came to less and less sightly places until at last he arrived at his hotel, the Tai Lai Tien, which was situated among a row of smallish wholesale fish shops in a narrow back street near Le Quai d'Est. All the streets in this neighbourhood were wet—in fact, they were wet all the year round—and a strong smell of fish prevailed. They were allotted the best room in the establishment, "First Class Mandarin's Room Number One" as it was labelled. Because they were not going to stay for long in Shanghai, they said nothing. They had never seen worse rooms.

But the wretchedness of the building was more than made up by the hospitality of the manager and some of its regular patrons. Word had reached them that Ta Tung and Ting were victims of the Manchu Court, and that

they were "going to Hongkong", a phrase of which everyone knew the significance, and that made them very popular in the whole street. People came to their room—and most of them were labourers and small tradesmen who were uneducated—and with their teeth clenched or grinding, denounced the Empress Dowager and her followers in the most vile terms one could imagine. It was clear to Ta Tung that if there were right leadership, they would rise in open revolt against the present Government. It was rather paradoxical to hear these poor fellows declare that they did not mind at all being regarded as rebels, for they lived and worked in a foreign concession. Therefore they were under foreign protection and the Manchu authorities could do nothing to them. Yet they continued to condemn the Government for not being able to rid the country of foreign barbarians and redeem all the territories leased or ceded to the European and Japanese invaders.

After their evening meal, Ting suggested that they should go out and see what Shanghai was like at night, which was regarded by many as the best time to view the famous international port. Ta Tung made him go alone, while he himself went to see about their passage to Hongkong. For some reason unknown even to himself, Ta Tung began to hate Shanghai before he had really seen a small part of it. The sooner they could get away from here, the better he would feel. And luckily he found there was a boat sailing for Hongkong the very next day. Third class tickets did not cost much, and Ta Tung immediately booked two berths for Hongkong.

Reviewing his financial situation, Ta Tung found he was quite well off. Ting would refund the passage money he had advanced, and he calculated he would be left with a hundred or a hundred and fifty taels by the time he reached his destination. It was well known that living

expenses would be met once one joined the Shin Chung Hui, so he was hoping to send the remainder of his money to Lotus Fragrance. He hurried back to the hotel, and while waiting for Ting's return from his nocturnal inspection, he wrote a long letter to tell her about his journey. He also sent a letter to his Uncle Kang.

It was shortly after midnight when he finished his letters, and there was still no sign of Ting. Having heard all sorts of dreadful things about Shanghai, he was greatly worried. He sat waiting until three o'clock in the morning, but alas, he waited in vain. He had at last to inform his host, who was also alarmed. While the host was gone to get a detective, Ta Tung thought he had better inform the Police of the French Municipal Council. Several uniformed Chinese and Ananites soon came to inquire from Ta Tung about Ting's disappearance, and it seemed they had hoped Ta Tung could find him for them. When the host came back and found his hotel full of policemen, he tore his hair and exclaimed that he would soon be ruined.

The policemen seemed to have decided to stay there for some time and began to make themselves at home. The host had to supply tea, cigarettes, wines and refreshments. All they did was to make telephone calls from the hotel to various police branches, and the subject of their telephone conversations was not strictly limited to the disappearance of the young man.

About noon on the following day, Ting came in a carriage, and the policemen, on learning who he was, said at once that they must take him to their office to report the full matter to their chief. Ta Tung protested, but unavailingly. The host told him secretly that all they wanted was some money, which Ta Tung at last had to give them. Not until each of them had received ten taels would they hush the matter up. Immediately they were gone, their sergeant came with two attendants. It was the same story.

He must take Ting with him to report the whole matter to his chief, and he would not accept anything less than thirty taels. Ting had come back without a single piece of cash. He had to ask the host to pay for the carriage. Where he had been and what had happened to him he would not tell. The host looked at him knowingly, shaking his head at him and exclaiming

“Young man, you should be more careful.”

Ta Tung hurriedly settled the account with the host and dragged Ting off for the boat. He knew that if they stayed a little longer, he would not be able to meet further expenses, which were bound to increase. His purse was already almost empty, and by the time they arrived at Hongkong, they had not a smell of silver or copper on them.

CHAPTER XIII

*“It is easy to fire a fine shot
The difficulty lies in selecting a good target”*

NEVER had it been the intention of the authorities at Hongkong nor of the British Government to harbour the people who were planning a revolution in China. After the signature of the Nanking Treaty following the Opium War, the island of Hongkong was ceded to the English, whose sole aim was to develop it into a prosperous commercial port and a powerful naval outpost of the British Empire. Since then tens of thousands of people had poured into this island. Though it covers an area of some forty square miles, it had actually a very limited accommodation for those who had come. The whole island is almost one steep mountain. Only the tiny space at the foot of this mountain on the northern side is compara-

tively habitable. However, not many rows of streets could be built here without having to raise the ground level of each further street to an almost inaccessible height. Therefore, while people are overcrowded in the few developed streets along the northern banks of the harbour—Hong-kong in Chinese means “The Fragrant Harbour”—the rest of the island is almost deserted.

The British colonial pioneers in the East had one great quality their self-centredness, in the broad and narrow sense of the word. It was this engaging quality of theirs that built the British Empire. They were what they were, and all the people of other races must take them as they were. On the other hand, those who could speak their language, wear their dress, believe in their religion and understand their politics, were worthwhile for them to know. To them, there were only two kinds of people, those who could think and live the English way, and those who could not think at all and did not know how to live

To them, China was a great nuisance. For there were four hundred million people in that vast country and, except for a few compradors, clerks, butlers, amahs and other servants, they all belonged to the latter group. It was only human for them to have a much higher esteem for an amah who had worked in an English home for some years and could speak a little pidgin English, than for what they might call a “native philosopher”. Chinese religions were pagan beliefs to them, and Chinese politics primitive struggles. To condescend to inquire into such things would lower their dignity and consequently harm the prestige of the British Empire.

The execution of the six reform leaders, which shocked the whole nation, was nothing more than a farce to some of them, and a tragedy which had cost not more than six lives to others. Even the British Minister, who was forced to break off his holiday at the seaside, had never heard of

the name of Kang Yu-Wei before his return to Peking from Pe-Tai-Ho. It is pardonable that people who came to Hongkong to promote commerce should utterly disregard the Shin Chung Hui. But at the request of the Chinese Government, this secret organisation was banned in Hongkong, and anybody who had anything to do with it was liable to be arrested.

The Chinese underlings who were working in the Hongkong police force knew to some extent what the Chien Han Hong was for. But they were not well educated people who could grasp the seriousness of the eventual outcome of such a secret organisation, and they were neither capable nor concerned enough to go so far as to explain the whole complicated matter to their British superiors. As long as these crazy adventurers obeyed the British law and created no disturbance in British territory, they preferred to tolerate them with one eye open and the other shut.

In point of fact, not only did those people who were connected with this secret association give no trouble to the police, but they also absorbed a large number of dangerous elements and made them live within the law. As Hongkong had been reported to be a port where one could pick up gold, many good-for-nothing and wishing to get rich quick loafers had come there to make their fortunes. They were bad workers and had been the headache of the foremen of various establishments, as well as the burden of the police. Gradually, one by one, nearly all of them drifted along to join the Shin Chung Hui, and the police knew they had to thank the Chien Han Hong for taking off their hands these troublesome dregs of society.

Just before they arrived at Hongkong, Ta Tung said to Ting.

"Now that we haven't any money left, we must get in

touch with the revolutionary association at once. Whom are you going to see?"

"Don't know anyone at all. Never have bothered about those details. Was told that they would only be too glad to have me."

"Do you know the place?"

"What place?"

"The Shin Chung Hui, of course."

"Called Shin Chung Hui? Thought just called Revolutionary Association."

"Shin Chung Hui is the proper name. The place we must find is the trading company which goes under the signboard of Chien Han Hong, in Stanton Road. I'm very bad at finding my way and must depend on you."

"Will soon find the place."

"Be careful and speak only to reliable people. I wish I could talk in the Cantonese dialect"

"Never fear. Leave everything to me."

As they could not afford to get a porter, both Ta Tung and Ting had to carry as much as—or rather more than—they could carry themselves. Burdened with suitcases, boxes, baskets, bundles and parcels, they walked awkwardly towards Queens Road Central. Ta Tung, who was lagging far behind with a much heavier and more cumbersome load of luggage, was surprised to see Ting approach the first policeman he came across.

"Ought not to trouble you," he said. "Can you direct me to Chien Han Hong, in Stanton Road?"

"Chien Han Hong?" The man glanced over him.

"Or Shin Chung Hui," Ting supplemented promptly

"What?" The policeman could hardly believe his ears

Ta Tung had hurried up to stop Ting, but was mortified to hear these fatal words which, though spoken in Cantonese, he could not fail to understand

"Come with me immediately." The policeman took Ting by the arm and almost dragged him away.

Ta Tung was in despair. He was certain that the policeman would arrest them. But they were led to a quiet alley and the policeman pointed a fatherly forefinger at Ting.

"You stupid fellow! How could you ask me where is the Shin Chung Hui? If I don't arrest you, I'll be sacked . . ."

"Oh!" Ting was at a loss for an answer.

"Luckily nobody was near me to have heard what you said. Now run away and don't mention the Shin Chung Hui to anybody. And remember, it has nothing to do with Chien Han Hong. Ask anybody who is wearing rags and loafing about and he'll take you there." And he turned away without looking back at them.

They had no difficulty in finding the place, for the streets of Hongkong were crowded with ragged loafers who were only too ready to take them there. As they were led to this secret headquarters of the revolutionary organisation, Ta Tung was asking himself whether the head of the place would take them on what they said themselves and let them join without suspecting them to be spies from the Manchu Court and, even if they were allowed to join, whether the ceremony of initiation to such a secret organisation would not be solemn and even frightening. He smiled at the thought that now he had to look after Ting in everything, while at first Lotus Fragrance had hinted that Ting might be a helpful companion.

Ta Tung could hardly believe that the narrow shop-front was the façade of Chien Han Hong. Stepping inside, he found the hall was crowded with people, standing, walking, sitting and even reclining on the floor, looking like a group of beggars. On hearing that they were new-

comers, all these people stared at Ta Tung and Ting, and particularly at Ting's luggage.

"Go upstairs and see Mr. Yang," several of them said casually.

As they started to go upstairs, someone stopped them and asked

"Are you taking these things to Mr. Yang? If not, leave them here."

Ting looked at the man and hesitated. But the man understood his meaning.

"You can trust your luggage to me. I am Colonel Pei. I'll be responsible for it."

They were very glad to be relieved of the burden, and repeatedly thanked Colonel Pei, who helped them to pile everything near the entrance.

The big room upstairs which they entered first was full of camp beds, and some of them were still occupied though it was late in the afternoon. They were taken to an inner room in which there were only half-a-dozen people. Mr. Yang, a very cheerful and cordial person who seemed to be a born leader and could easily be singled out even if he were standing among a big crowd, gave them a hearty welcome by slapping them heavily on the back. They were then given a big book in which they were asked to sign their names and write down their address, age, native place, parentage, education, specialities and experience. They modestly left the last two blank. Also they had no address, as they had just left their boat.

Mr. Yang glanced over the entries and passed the book to a Mr. Kung, asking him to issue two membership cards. Turning to Ta Tung and Ting, he said:

"You have no address, comrades. Do you want a place to sleep?"

This question, though very welcome, surprised Ta Tung a little. He thought there were more important

questions to be asked. However, he answered in the affirmative.

"We are much more overcrowded than usual, but we'll find a place for you Comrade Shih," he said to a jovial and fat young man, "these two new comrades are highly educated people. You must take them with you."

"You know quite well that I already have General Tao and Old Chu . . ." Shih protested.

"Two more won't do you much harm. You like good company."

"Living Devils! All right, if I must, I must." Turning to Ta Tung and Ting with a chuckle "Don't blame me, my excellent comrades, if you have to sleep standing. And have you a blanket between you?"

"I have one," Ta Tung answered.

"Have several," Ting assured him.

"Splendid!" Mr. Yang exclaimed.

"Lend me one," a man behind him shouted

"I can do with two," another declared promptly.

"Where are they? I want to get one, too" Mr Kung gave them their membership cards and followed them downstairs. The other two men came down also

But the luggage was gone! And so was the Colonel. When Ta Tung asked those who were there about the luggage, they laughed and said he could find his things in the nearest pawnshop. Kung and the other two men also laughed, exclaiming that their luck was bad and that they knew of this too late.

"Must find the Colonel." Ting was almost heartbroken to lose all his things, which comprised the whole of his earthly fortune.

"You won't be able to see his shadow until all the money is gone." Kung smiled and went upstairs.

"Have you two simpletons had your bite yet?" Shih came down and asked them with a smile

"No."

"I thought so. Go and show your tickets to the God of Wealth and get your ration."

He led them to a small back room and Mr. Liang, the cashier, stamped their cards and gave each of them a silver twenty cent piece.

"Now, my wealthy comrades, run along and cash your gold before the God of Wealth leaves the bank."

They could not understand this, and Shih had to tell them that some of those silver pieces might be counterfeit, and so it was safer to change them into coppers immediately in a little money shop next door. If it was no good they could bring it back to the treasurer and change it for another piece. Also, a pile of heavy coppers would not slip out of one's pocket, while a small silver coin would sometimes vanish and that would mean going hungry for the day.

With the coppers safely in their pockets, they were conducted by Shih to a tea-shop nearby and a good supper was ordered. Shih invited himself as their guest.

Ta Tung did not know what to think of the things which he had seen that afternoon. It was unbelievable that anybody without any introduction could be initiated into this organisation which had such sacred work in front of it. Neither had Mr Yang nor anybody else asked them any kind of questions. What if they were spies for the Government, or just loafers who came merely to swindle twenty cents a day? It seemed to him that this famous association was no more than a band of rogues. He did not mention his work in the reform movement because, firstly, he knew that the revolutionists did not approve of reform and, secondly, he did not want to show that he had more experience than Ting. He was prepared to tell them about his acquaintance with Mr. Yung in case

they should question him about his sincerity in joining the organisation, but he was amazed that they were accepted outright. During the meal Ta Tung tactfully hinted at these problems to Shih, and the jolly man laughed.

"No fear, my priceless comrade, we know who are spies. Actions, not words, are what we like to see. Rely on what you are told, and your precious head may leave your blessed shoulders one day. What is speciality? What is experience? Dog's wind! Not worth a copper. People with glorious pasts are timid and good-for-nothing, while young rascals can perform miracles. We get to know all these wretched devils as time goes on. No use to judge them by their filthy appearance or honeyed words."

"Action?" Ting put in. "Am ready for action any time."

"Not yet, my rash comrade. You need some practice. Can you handle a Browning and hit your target from twenty paces? What was your previous occupation? Not that I care a damn. Have you seen a pistol before?"

"No. I was a student in Peking University."

"You look like a waiter, my scholarly comrade. And I know I look like a beggar, but I was one of the richest men in Shanghai until I speculated in gold at the Exchange. I lost my blooming fortune in a night. I came here not because of poverty, but because of the nasty looks of my friends and relatives when they knew I had not a copper to bless myself with. I wished I could not remember their charming smiles when I was rolling in money!"

After the repast, he took them to the place where they were to sleep. It was a tiny back room on the top floor of a slum house not far from the Race Course. The ground and first floors were used as a store-house for dried preserved food, and the place had a peculiar smell which came from the goods stored there. There were no beds,

and they all slept on the floor. Ta Tung had to share Shih's blanket, and Ting used the General's

Soon General Tao, as he was called, came in, a very small man in his early twenties. If the old saying, "His strength is not enough to truss a chicken", could be literally true, General Tao was the very man it referred to. He came from Szechuan and spoke with a strange native accent. Though a very bad speaker, he was extremely talkative. Long before midnight approached he had told the newcomers everything about himself and the complete history of his family.

"My father had ten children, of whom I am the youngest. He wished all his sons to become military men, an ambition which was once his when he was young. He was tall and big and used to have great strength. He was very good at riding, archery, fencing and boxing. While all my brothers have inherited his physical legacy, I am the only one to disappoint him. Yet, strange to say, my mother carried me for eleven months, and my father thought I was sure to be a great general. It was said that when I was born I was no bigger than his fist. And my father was born prematurely, after a pregnancy of only seven months. People had thought he could not be brought up."

"Was he brought up after all?" Ting asked.

"Shut up, you idiot," Shih cried

"He taught me every kind of military art, as he did my elder brothers. My mother wanted me to follow a literary career, and my father constantly quarrelled with her until she died of grief. When all my elder brothers grew up and none succeeded in passing the first state military examination, my father also died of grief. He left behind him an enormous fortune, and my elder brothers went to law against each other for claiming greater inheritances. This went on for years until all the family estate was sold.

and there was still not enough to meet the legal expenses. From my childhood I was nicknamed 'the General' by my brothers just to spite me for my poor health. And after my father's death my life at home became more intolerable. They often manhandled me and boxed my ears."

"Should hit back. Why let them do it?" Ting felt as if he himself were insulted.

"Shut up, you idiot," Shih commanded.

"My forehead is bigger than any of theirs, and for that I received many hard knocks from their knuckles. I wonder whether my premature baldness is due to that?"

"You had the disease of a scald-head, my beautiful comrade!" Shih sneered.

"I was used as their errand boy, to be fed by my elder brothers in turn. Each undertook to feed me for a month. At the end of every month the brother who was to be rid of me was always very glad, and at the beginning of every month the brother who was to have me always looked as if he were sick. Last year I was sent to collect some money from a neighbouring village and when I left the place it was dark. I was very scared of dogs, and as I tried to run home, a big wolf dog chased me. I fell and lost the money in the dark. I was unarmed, you see."

"And the dog was armed to the teeth?" Shih asked.

"They beat me until I was half dead and turned me out. Nobody would take me again. I decided to leave them for good after spending the night in the fields. Next morning, when I was passing the village which I visited the day before the big wolf dog came near me again, and in his mouth he carried the small bundle of money which I had lost in the dark. He was not so fierce as before, so I took the money and came here."

"And have repeated the story to me at least fifty times," Shih added.

Old Chu came in long after midnight. Seeing two more people were sharing the room, he swore loudly and went to sleep without speaking to anybody.

At first Ta Tung was somewhat disappointed. They were kept doing nothing except going to receive the daily "ration" of twenty cents by presenting their "tickets" to be stamped at the "bank", as the headquarters was called. There were several hundreds of them, and nearly all of them went about loafing in the streets. Shih and Tao were good companions and entertained them with endless tales of their past experience. Old Chu was a poet, and seldom spoke except when angry and swearing. They never saw their luggage again, Colonel Pei they met once more, two weeks afterwards. The man simply said that those things were superfluous for a revolutionary and they had been converted into money which had been spent wisely for a good cause.

Ta Tung began to feel miserable. Though Ting seemed to regard him as an elder brother and would not do anything without obtaining his permission first, he noticed the young man preferred the company of others rather than his. This new life, mixing with various eccentric or reckless people who had nothing to do every day except wander about the streets, had a charm for Ting. And then Ting liked to talk in Cantonese with those who spoke the dialect. Ta Tung could not help feeling that, as the days went by, they were beginning to lose their interest in politics, and that the younger man's mind would be poisoned by talking too much about women and debauchery with some of those whose characters were utterly loose. As for himself, he went to the newspaper offices regularly every morning to read the copies of the papers that were posted on the wall for the public to read. Apart from being well-informed about the condition of the whole world through the papers, he was

also improving his English by studying the English papers carefully.

Whenever he wrote to Lotus Fragrance, he had to conclude his letter after a few sentences. There was nothing to tell her, and there were so many things which he must not let her know. He wrote less and less frequently to her, but more and more often to his Uncle Kang.

The thing which he could not understand was that there were positively no political discussions among the members. He tried to broach the subject on many occasions, either with his more intimate comrades or with almost strangers in the "bank". When they heard him mention politics, Shih roared with laughter and talked about other things, Old Chu the poet sneered and went away, General Tao merely said he was wasting his time, and the others invariably looked at him with a queer expression and turned away. At first he suspected that there must be something wrong, but at last resigned himself to the assumption that people who joined this organisation were confirmed revolutionaries who must have had enough discussion on the subject and now regarded any further talk as tending to shake instead of confirm their resolution. After all, it is said that people who talk do not act, whereas people who act do not talk. He secretly asked Ting what he thought about this, but Ting said it had never occurred to him that discussion on politics was so important. Anyhow he knew that everybody was prepared to do everything to overthrow the Manchu regime and that was good enough for him.

At the end of the year, Mr Yang suddenly asked Ta Tung one day, when he was collecting his "ration" at the "bank", would he like to practise target shooting

"Certainly, Mr Yang" He was overjoyed. 'Action at last,' he thought.

"Old Chu is one of those who are going to supervise and there are just a few vacancies. I thought perhaps you and your friend, Ting, would like to go."

"I'll get him at once"

"Oh, no, not unless he himself is willing You mustn't force him."

When he told Ting about this, Ting was as happy as happy could be They only wished Shih and Tao were also going.

They were given a rough sketch map of Hongkong, and in the middle of the hill among some paths was marked a cross, with the words "Liu Garden" beneath it. They were told to be at the Liu Garden on the 23rd of the 12th moon. It was difficult climbing along the narrow and steep path, and finding the way, even with the help of the map, was not easy Ta Tung found Ting much worse than himself at finding his way. However, they managed to arrive there late in the morning, and found the Liu Garden was a beautiful secluded villa with an extensive enclosure. It was luxuriously furnished, but every room looked strange because the furniture had been moved to a corner and plenty of space left free There was nobody to receive them but they saw that other people continued to arrive At lunch time a simple meal was served in the dining and sitting-rooms, and there were about sixty people, all ill-clad and evidently all fellow-members, sitting down to swallow this food ravenously.

There was nothing doing in the afternoon, but after the evening meal Old Chu collected them and four others and led them to the garden, where a row of targets was erected Each was given a Browning automatic pistol, and Old Chu began to lecture them on the mechanics of the weapon. At dusk, when every house on the island was, according to an age-old Chinese custom, letting off fire-crackers to worship their kitchen god, cartridges were

distributed and they were taught to aim at the target. Shooting practice went on, with occasional breaks for instruction by the tutor. There were ten tutors and each had six men under him. The targets were illuminated and they could be seen clearly in the dark. About midnight, when the sound of the fire-crackers began to cease, they also stopped practising and went to bed. They slept on the floor of the rooms where the furniture had been moved to one side.

From the 24th of the 12th moon there is a celebration almost every day throughout the new year until the 15th of the 1st moon, which is the Festival of Lanterns. As fire-crackers were set off at every house at all hours of the day, they could go on with their target shooting without being noticed by anybody. Old Chu was a painstaking tutor and a dead shot. There was actually not much to learn. All that was needed was a little explanation and plenty of practice. After three weeks incessant training they had all become fairly good marksmen. By sharing blankets with various people, Ta Tung became acquainted with more comrades, some of whom he found were well educated though looking exactly like beggars. It was during this short stay that he got to know Old Chu better. Besides being completely surprised to find Chu such a good shot and understanding various arms so well, Ta Tung also had a chance to have a glimpse of his poetical writing, of which he heard no mention by anybody.

Formerly, though they had been sharing a room, they had seldom met and spoken with each other. When Ta Tung went to bed—if the floor could be called “bed”—Old Chu was still out. And when Ta Tung got up in the morning and went out to the “bank”, Old Chu was always still fast asleep. In the Liu Garden he noticed that Old Chu was always humming and sometimes wrote a hurried line or phrase on a piece of old ragged and torn paper,

which abounded in his pockets. He smoked quite a lot and often used those papers to light his cigarettes. One day Ta Tung found a piece of paper on the floor of the room, a part of which was burned. On it was written a poem, but alas, only half of it was left. The first two lines read

*"I raise my head and ask Heaven, but Heaven seems
aloof;
I look at Earth, and Earth maintains an indifferent
silence."*

Ta Tung was enchanted by these lines and desired to hear the concluding couplet. He ventured to give the paper to Old Chu, intending to ask him about it. But the man received it casually and lit his cigarette with it immediately without saying a single word. Later on Ta Tung made several attempts to engage him in conversation, but he only uttered a few oaths and went away.

After the shooting practice, they went back to their old places again, and life was as eventless as before. But Ta Tung seemed to have discovered the secret soul of the organisation and began to view the ordinary, unshaven and rugged faces of his everyday comrades in a new light. He knew some of them were the best marksmen he imagined could possibly be, and yet once they came back to resume their loafing life in the streets of Hongkong, they never even mentioned their training and attainments, but went on drinking, yarning, joking and swearing just as before.

Another day, Mr Yang asked Ta Tung and Ting if they cared to go to Canton to work in a chemical laboratory, and soon they were sent to the British Concession in Sha-Mien, which was originally a sandbank, as the Chinese word implied, south west of Canton. The journey from Hongkong was some eighty miles, and by

waterways a steam launch could get there in a few hours. Behind a small pharmacy kept by an Irishman there was a small room on the ground floor, a big room in the basement and two small rooms upstairs, all crowded with materials and equipment for making explosives. Some thirty comrades were assembled there, and the Irishman began by illustrating with chalk on a blackboard the principles and the different parts and ingredients of explosives. He spoke with a broad Irish accent and one of the comrades, whom Ta Tung had often met the year before in Hongkong but never spoken to, interpreted in Chinese to the rest. When later on they found Ta Tung could also speak fluent English, he was asked to interpret. The other interpreter was as much surprised at Ta Tung's knowledge of English as Ta Tung was at his.

After the simple explanation, they started to learn how to make explosives at once. For several weeks they worked day and night, and practised the various ways of dissecting and then reassembling all the parts. They made quite a number of bombs of various sizes, and when the Irishman was satisfied that they had all mastered the art, they were led to the hill outside the North Gate of the city of Canton to try their products in a slate quarry.

When they left another group came, and Ta Tung was kept there to relieve the other interpreter, after which they took turns. While one was with the Irishman, the other went back to Hongkong loafing.

Ta Tung now realised that this revolutionary association, which seemed unorganised and inactive even to the members themselves, was actually carrying on its fundamental work in secret without any fanfare. Hundreds of centres of training were in action in all parts of the province, and members were sent to various quarters to be drilled in riding, running, wall-scaling, jumping, pole-vaulting, rowing and sailing under skilled tutors. Since

their attempt to capture Canton in the 21st year of Kwang Hsu (1895) had failed and many comrades had sacrificed their lives, they had learned their first lesson by bitter experience, and a thorough fundamental training was given to every member before he was assigned to any work. The method of organisation also had undergone a drastic change. Instead of systematic arrangements with notices in writing and other formal announcements, they had now adopted this most unorthodox way of working. Years of practice had improved their seemingly casual method of conducting business, and it could be said that serious business was most effectually carried out in a holiday spirit. While everybody was feeling they were spending all their time on holiday—for training in the various arts of revolution was like attending a holiday school or a country party—each member was being drilled to be able to cope with a score of soldiers.

The general friendly atmosphere among the members was only acquired after years of careful experiment and energetic practice. The association had been maintaining steel-like discipline for years, and now the outward utter lack of discipline covered actually its perfect discipline. To obey rules laid down on paper was mere child's play compared with an understanding observance of a traditional spirit piously maintained by thousands of men. At first Ta Tung wondered how this undisciplined discipline could be kept going for no punishment ever seemed to be given, but he soon learned that actually a member with a "ticket" and obtaining his "ration" from the "bank" was not really initiated until long after he had been proved able to maintain the traditional spirit without any application of disciplinary measures. In fact, many members were removed long before they had any inkling of what the association was doing.

Ta Tung gradually found out that Mr. Yang, the presi-

dent, outwardly a genial and happy-go-lucky person, was in reality a very shrewd and businesslike man. He had the remarkable gift of remembering a face once he had met the man. The secretary, Mr. Kung, was a handwriting expert besides being a man of letters, and had read extensively. The funds, which seemed inexhaustible, for the "rations" of members and numerous expenses in the various centres of training, were generously donated by patriots from all parts of the world—New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, Singapore, Honai, Batavia, Bombay, Shanghai and, of course, Hongkong. In fact, a local banker who dealt with all the big English merchants, besides making a handsome monthly contribution, undertook to give unlimited credit to Mr. Yang, with perfect confidence that he would never spend a copper unnecessarily, and that contributions would always come from abroad to meet the expenses of the association. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's travels abroad and his eloquence had opened many a gold mine to the organisation.

In the spring of the 26th year of Kwang Hsu (1900), all the leaders of the secret societies of the Yangtze Valley and of the Provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung assembled in Hongkong to pledge allegiance to the Shin Chung Hui, and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen was elected President in Chief of all the societies. The occasion was a little too ostentatious and the Hongkong government decided to refuse Dr Sun permission to embark when he returned from abroad in the 5th moon. In the meantime, the Manchu Court had declared war against all the foreign nations, and Boxer troops under Prince Tuan and the Grand Secretary, Kang Yi, two Manchu diehards, started to attack all the Legations in Peking.

In the 8th moon, when Peking had fallen and the Empress Dowager had escaped to Shansi with the

Emperor, Tang, a comrade who was closely linked with the banished reformers, prepared to start a revolution in Hankow. But Viceroy Chang Chih-Tung, who had secret communications with Tang, suddenly decided to remain loyal to the fleeing Empress, and he executed Tang and started to wipe out all the revolutionaries in the two provinces of Hunan and Hupeh.

Dr. Sun, though unable to participate in anything himself, had ordered an outbreak in Kwangtung. Mr. Yang therefore gathered most of his secret forces in Waichow, a strategic city some seventy miles east of Canton. He gave the command to a comrade by the name of Cheng, and Dr Sun had arranged for a continuous supply of arms from Japan. General Tao, Old Chu and Ting were all three ordered to join in this uprising at Waichow.

In Canton itself only a small body of men, including Ta Tung and Shih, were secretly posted, because the Viceroy Teh Show, forewarned by the example of Viceroy Chang Chih-Tung, had taken early precautions to see that no rebels were in his capital. The Waichow outbreak started in the Interlocutory 8th moon, and as the men were all trained, they soon occupied all the neighbouring districts and had access to the South Sea, waiting for the shipments of arms from Japan to make further advances.

The Viceroy Teh Show ordered vigorous searches to be made in Canton. Ta Tung's orders were to break out and create panic in the city when the revolutionary troops in Waichow approached. Every day they heard of the victories of their comrades in Waichow, and the others were eager to start, but Ta-Tung tried his best to stop them and get them to bide their time. The city gates were under observation. To supply them with more fire-arms was therefore impossible, and later even materials for making explosives could not be got through. All they had

were some thirty small explosives, hurriedly assembled in Canton, and Ta Tung and his comrades looked at them, not knowing what to do. Shih suggested that they should bomb the Great East Gate so that their comrades from Waichow would find no difficulty in entering the city.

"No, comrades" Ta Tung had a better idea. "It is said that in shooting at your enemy it is better to shoot at his horse first, and to catch a band of robbers it is best to catch the chief. I believe that all the soldiers and police may be won over if only we can get rid of the Manchu Viceroy Teh Show. Now let us each take a bomb—I wish they were not so noticeable—and go to the Viceroy's Yamen."

"I'll dash in with two bombs in my hands, and whoever dares to stop me gets the first," Shih shouted.

"No. You'll have miles to go before you can come near the Viceroy, who lives in the innermost part of the Yamen. We would finish all our bombs before we reached the second or third courtyard. We will go to the back of the Yamen at night, and with one or two bombs will make an opening in the back wall large enough for us to get through. The Viceroy's private apartment cannot be far away from there, and one of us must resolve to reserve his bomb for His Excellency, no matter what happens."

"Good!" Shih exclaimed. "I'll be the one. When do we start?"

"To-night." Ta Tung knit his brow. "Our comrades in Waichow have held out for over a month and though they are doing well, there must be some hitch somewhere. Otherwise they should have been here long ago. We had better do our part and perhaps it will help them."

"Let us stop talking, and start as soon as it is dark." Shih was impatient.

"No. As late as we can possibly loaf in the streets without raising suspicion. If we start too early we may

find His Excellency not yet back in his private apartment."

"You all follow me at a quarter to ten, just before the time of curfew."

"No. We must slip there one by one and by various different routes Let us map it out now."

None of them could draft a good and accurate map of the streets of the city. Each one made some contribution, and at last they had a fairly reliable rough sketch giving all the possible roads leading to the Yamen. Each chose a route and agreed to meet at the back wall of the building by a quarter to ten, as suggested by Shih. After supper they began to slip out into the street, each with a bomb wrapped up in newspaper or brown paper. Ta Tung had chosen the shortest route, which would not take more than seven minutes to get him to his destination. Realising his shortcomings, he started at half-past nine to be on the safe side, carrying a sketch map with him. After two turnings he found the streets quite different from what he thought they ought to be. His map was no help. He knew it by heart, but the actual layout of the streets was far more complicated than that sketched on the paper. Besides, he could not read it by the dim light of the street lamps. He had to use his sense of direction, which, alas, was always fallible.

As he trotted on, making one wrong turning after another, he suddenly heard loud explosions, and a little later the report of rifles. He started to dash towards the direction from which the noise came, knowing that he could not go wrong by that. Soon people began to run from all directions, and the streets were immediately deserted. As he was dashing along, he came face to face with a policeman. He tried to avoid this man in uniform, whom he knew to be his enemy. But the policeman overtook him and quickly snatched his brown paper parcel

from his hand. Putting it into a water reservoir by the side of the road, the policeman said in great haste:

"Go home. All is finished. The Viceroy's men have come out and will fire at anybody in sight. They will be this way very soon."

Perceiving that the man was friendly, Ta Tung asked "Did we get the Viceroy?"

"No! He never sleeps in the city."

"How about our men?"

"They were all made to go home peacefully before the guards were out—except one, who rushed straight into the Yamen. We had to arrest him. It would have looked so bad if we hadn't."

"Why don't you people turn on our side and disarm the Viceroy's bodyguard?"

"We are outnumbered. If the revolutionaries in Waichow had managed to get near the city it would be different. I wonder why they do not come."

"So do I!"

"Good night, and take care of yourself."

"Thank you. I hope we'll meet again."

When he went back to his lodgings, he found they had all come back dejected except Shih who, in spite of the friendly policeman's persuasions, rushed into captivity. Poor Shih, his life was sacrificed, and their attempt ended in a farce. What they did achieve was the destruction of a large part of the back wall of the Viceroy's Yamen and the death of about twenty small officials and servants.

They went back to Hongkong as soon as things were quiet. Ta Tung learned that the Waichow outbreak had also ended in defeat, for the Japanese Cabinet underwent a change ten days after they had started the revolution, and no shipment of arms had been sent to them. After more than a month's heroic struggle, when they were told that the new Japanese Cabinet had a different policy

towards China, they had to disband, and stole back to Hongkong. As before, a number of comrades had lost their lives.

Ta Tung knew that a revolution could never succeed without great sacrifice, but the death of Shih was a severe blow to him. He waited anxiously for his friends from Waichow, and felt truly thankful when Ting and Tao came back safely. He asked for Old Chu, who, he was told, was slightly wounded but was fast recovering and would be on his way soon. He was at present in safe hands. Two weeks later he came back, with a scar on his face.

Not long afterwards a simple feast was given by Mr. Yang and other leaders to those who had been responsible for the Waichow and Canton revolutions. The traditional ceremony of pouring some wine on the ground as a libation to the martyrs was solemnly performed. Then Old Chu, whose work was praised by everybody from Waichow, broke his silence.

"I wish we had more arms! I wish we had better propaganda!"

After these sentences he never said another word throughout the whole meal.

Ta Tung was exactly of the same mind, but his words were more illuminating and constructive.

"The lives of all of us except comrade Shih were saved by the sympathy we received from the policemen. They were quite ready to come over to our side if we had had a greater force to beat the foe. If we won their support without much propaganda, we can certainly win the support of the Guards if we have enough publicity. Most of them thought we were just bandits and robbers."

"Yes," Mr. Yang agreed. "When I learned that the new Japanese Government had suddenly placed a ban on her export of arms, I tried everywhere to get supplies. The best plan was to persuade the soldiers at the Provincial

Munition Storehouse to come on our side. When we sent comrades to approach them, they said they had never heard of Shin Chung Hui and had been told that the rebels at Waichow were nothing more than Boxers or Long Haired Bandits."

"Besides having our organs of publicity in Hongkong and Shanghai to keep the city people informed," Ta Tung continued, "we must also develop our mobile publicity machinery, which could be set up or dispersed in a very short time. That will help us to inform the masses of our aims and work wherever we have to strike. Our fundamental training has now been proved insufficient and impractical. For instance, we have learned how to make bombs, but we have to depend entirely on material coming from Europe and America. If we could utilise local material, we could have enough bombs in Canton to blow up the whole of the Viceroy's Yamen. We waited in Canton for over a month and could do nothing."

"We learn by costly experience," Yung said sadly.

"Map studying and making are also urgent. We think we know a place, but there may be a lot of streets and lanes of which we could make use if we knew them in minute detail."

After each failure they learned some vital point, and it was always with alacrity that they improved their method of training. At Ta Tung's suggestion, printing and lithography were taught to some members, and special attention was paid to the reproduction of papers and documents in the quickest time and with the simplest equipment. Explosive manufacture, following Ta Tung's ideas, began to take fancy shapes. Instead of the orthodox type of bombs, they experimented on the making of explosives in big flower pots, vases and heavy tea-kettles, large earthen jars, small wine pots and a score of other domestic vessels. They also learned to utilise as ingredients as many home

products as possible in substitution for foreign chemicals. They further began to collect and make the most detailed and up-to-date street plans of all the chief cities in China, and each member had to check those of the locality in which he was born or brought up as to whether it was correct and whether he could make any further contributions to the map.

Time flew by, and various attempts were made in various cities, with the invariable result that some more of their comrades were lost and that they still needed more training and more careful preparation. Not only had they lost many brethren, but also one of their chief leaders, Mr Yang, was gone. While they had failed to kill the Viceroy Teh Show, Teh Show himself succeeded in sending an assassin to Hongkong to murder Mr. Yang. As Mr. Yang was easily accessible, it was a risk of which everyone was aware. After that a number of assassinations and attempts at assassination were carried out by their members and affiliated members, and the lives of Viceroys and Governors became pawns in the hands of the secret societies.

Ta Tung and his friends had numerous setbacks, but each defeat made them more determined to achieve their ambition. They thought the Manchu Court would collapse after the Boxer War, but the bloody Empress Dowager lived until the 34th year of Emperor Kwang Hsu (1908), when they both died within two days. Following her posthumous command, another boy Emperor, Hsuan Tung, was put on the Dragon Throne, and the country went from bad to worse. Yuan had enjoyed Imperial favour while the Empress Dowager was living. He was promoted to Governor, then Viceroy, and finally Grand Councillor. But on her death he immediately fell into disgrace, and hurriedly retired to his native district in Honan.

Though Ta Tung and Lotus Fragrance were unable to meet each other for so many years, and their letters were frequently lost, they seemed to have kept spiritual communication with each other. He knew she was well in Peking in spite of the fact that she had very little to tell him. Ten years continued service at the Palace yielded a good reward. Also she realised what difficulties he encountered and quite understood that he was unable to write to her from most of the places where he was stationed and that when he could write her it was no more than a short message of love. She was not lonely and he was not unhappy, though they were both looking forward anxiously to the day when they could be united once more. People talk of a soldier's fortitude and endurance, they should know that that of a soldier's wife is equally great, if not greater.

CHAPTER XIV

*"Those who fight for Liberty
Never gain themselves but ill
Those who live within its shade
Never cared and never will."*

A MAN may try to move heaven and earth in order to be an Emperor when he fully realises that he has not the remotest hope of being one. Yet sometimes an Heir-Apparent may be born throne-shy and willing to give anything and everything to escape such an ordeal. The poor three-year-old Prince Henry Pu-Yi, who was to succeed his late miserable uncle Kwang Hsu as the 13th Emperor of China, kicking and howling, refused to go through the important ceremony of being enthroned. His

father the Prince Chun, the Regent, had to hold him firmly in his arms and, trying to stop the child's uncere-monious voice, said—

"Don't cry, good boy. Soon it will be over."

Fatalists believed this to be an ill-omen as, indeed it was shown to be in less than three years, but no one would recall the numerous auspicious things uttered just as casually and unwittingly but which never brought any effect.

It is said that when a melon is ripe, it will come off its stem by itself. When Ta Tung was ordered, in the 3rd year of the reign of Hsuan Tung, to join in the preparations for a revolution in Hankow by the Shin Chung Hui—which by now had been reorganised and renamed the Tung Min Hui or the China Union Society, and was later known as the Kuo Min Tang or the National Party—the time was ripe for the downfall of the Manchus. But for a secret society consisting of a handful of men to overthrow a dynasty which had reigned over the vast and resourceful Chinese Empire for more than two and a half centuries, was to start with nothing in a fight against everything. Unless a miracle happened, to hope for success was to hope for the impossible. Yet when the whole population of the Empire, from being once loyal subjects of the ruling house, had gradually become its enemies and, what was even worse, had become sympathisers and supporters of the new cause, then the two parties had changed places, and the case was that everything fought against nothing. It could be regarded that a miracle did happen, and it was a miracle which happened within the strict limits of scientific principles. The impossible now became the inevitable.

Ta Tung had been a participant of numerous previous failures, which had so resulted not through lack of courage and determination, though some of the earlier outbreaks rather lacked thoroughness in planning and preparation

Indeed, after each defeat the revolutionaries had lost no time in getting themselves together again, more determined and more confident than ever that they would succeed the next time, and made great haste to prepare for another blow. In the course of the last twenty years there had been no less than twenty-seven attempts, in many of which "blood flowed as in a river and corpses piled up like a mountain", and every one of these attempts was an heroic struggle against great and overwhelming odds, to be remembered, wept and sung by posterity.

On several occasions Ta Tung had been wounded. Ting, who would not miss an opportunity of going wherever Ta Tung went, even had a bullet in his left arm, and there it still remained. Among his comrades Ta Tung had now been nicknamed the "idealist", though he protested strongly that he was a very practical man. It was because of his recommendation that special attention was paid to publicity, and that a large mobile press with a big staff of experts was always attached to any headquarters which intended to make a bid for power. He had been the head of this department for some years, and the way he conducted the publicity certainly justified his nickname of the "idealist". He argued that anything worth doing was worth doing well. It was not merely because he wanted certain papers to be quickly reproduced in large numbers that he would order them to be printed, but because he firmly believed that anything printed in a dignified manner would command the respect of the common people, who would regard them as coming from authoritative quarters. It was perfectly true that the Tai Ping rebellion was a failure partly because all its official documents and notices were written in a style utterly unreadable. People could see that those responsible for them were not fit to rule. He must not fall into the same mistake. If Ta Tung could have conducted his business in

the open, such a policy would have presented no difficulties. But everything they wanted printed had to be done in secret and in a great hurry, and so whenever they found that nothing could deter him from persistently maintaining his principles, they swore and cursed him and called him the "idealist".

A very able and clever comrade, Sun Wu, was trusted with the important task of directing affairs in Hankow. Sun was a veteran fighter who had had experience in many battles. He had established his headquarters in the Russian Concession, and under his direction a large number of bombs and hand grenades were made, and also a lot of arms and ammunition accumulated to be used in the outbreak. He had a high regard for Ta Tung, whose suggestion that bombs should be made to resemble all kinds of domestic articles he had not only admired but promptly followed. In his room one dared not move anything without first making sure that it was not an explosive in disguise.

When Ta Tung came to Hankow, he found the building in which Sun had made his headquarters not big enough to house his staff and equipment. For the convenience of getting a supply of good paper and other material from an English firm, he moved to a house in the British Concession. As this time they aimed at an all-out attempt, nearly all the members in Hongkong were ordered to join. Ting would naturally have preferred to work with Ta Tung, but because he had recently discovered that nearly all the uneducated people working for British firms invariably referred to England as *Great Britain*, and that even the patriots knew no better than to give such a pompous qualifying word to that tiny island country, he decided to remain in the Russian Concession and work under Sun with his bombs.

At that time the whole Empire was crying for reform

and new ways. Under the pressure of public opinion the Government was creating a New Army, modelled very much after those specially trained by Yuan Shih-kai at Shiao-Chan. A division of this New Army, the Eighth Division under General Chang Piao, had been recruited and was stationed in and around Wu-Chang, the Provincial capital of Hupeh, situated on the south bank of the Yangtze River and forming the most strategic part of the triple cities of Wu-Han (These are Hankow, Wu-Chang and Han-Yang.) Old Chu, who had come much earlier than the others, had obtained, through his fine marksmanship, the rank of captain in this New Army. There also was his old companion, General Tao, now serving as a cook private in a different brigade

At first it was decided to strike on the Mid-Autumn Festival night when the moon would be full. But because the preparations were on a grand scale, several important arrangements had been unavoidably delayed. They all therefore agreed to postpone it for ten days. But somehow or other the authorities had heard rumours, and having been intimidated by so many previous examples, Jui Chen, the Viceroy, took some precautionary measures. He sent for the Yangtze Fleet to patrol the waters between Hankow and Wu-Chang by day and night, and also ordered General Chang Piao, Commander of the Eighth Division, to march his Sixteenth Brigade of Infantrymen, who comprised the most dangerous elements of the New Army and of which Old Chu's company was one, to the borders of Hupeh and Szechuan to be stationed there for the time being

The unexpected departure of his potential support greatly alarmed Sun. It affected very much his grand strategy. In the remaining Fifteenth Brigade of Infantrymen there were only a few comrades. General Tao, though a private in rank, was doing wonders in recruiting

for the revolution. But it was a pity that he did not join the army earlier. Being a cook, he had opportunities of mixing with nearly all the "brethren of the rank and file" when they were relaxing, and that was the ideal time to tell them about the urgency of overthrowing the Manchus. Tao was not a very good speaker, but his appearance was a great help. When he spoke about the miseries of the common people and the suppression they had undergone from the Manchus, he was a very picture of a victim. He represented the personification of "a burned scalp and scarred forehead" and his tragic smile, which he acquired when he was with his brothers, inspired immediate sympathy. His deep pathetic voice alone was effective enough to move many hearts.

Sun's decision to postpone the blow was greatly welcomed by Ta Tung, who now found plenty of time to go on with his job with his usual thoroughness. He designed and prepared numerous posters and handbills, and he even excelled all his previous efforts by drafting a "Declaration of Liberty" in the best classical literary style, which any man of letters would be proud to have. In it he recalled all the follies the Manchu leaders had committed, and pointed out that it was always the Chinese common people who had to pay. The Opium War, the Sino-Japanese Conflict and the Boxer Fiasco, they were all the same story. Rulers blundered at the expense of the people. Now it was time for the masses to take the matter into their own hands.

With the pride of an author who was pleased with his inspired work, he decided to write it in his own hand and have it lithographed on good paper and in large quantities. Never before had he had access to such abundant supplies of fine paper and printing materials as from the English firm a few doors away. Never before had he had so much time to see that everything was done to perfection. The

poet within him also prompted him to print a folder in sixteen pages of the verses he had composed from time to time during his revolutionary career. Nearly all of them were written in memory of his comrades who had given their lives for the cause of the emancipation of the Chinese people, and he entitled this little collection of short poems "Songs of Liberty". It was a thing which he had been always longing to do, but through lack of time and material his hopes had never been fruitful until now, when he thought it was opportune for him to do so. Because of the postponement of the uprising, he had a little leisure to indulge in such things; and the manager of the English firm, knowing him to be a man of taste, had presented him with some very artistic English hand-made paper of a kind which he had never seen before and thought ideal for the publication of this little folder. As nearly all his friends were in Hankow and its neighbourhood, he distributed it among those who had a taste for good poetry on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Three days after the Festival, when Sun was extremely busy with his preparations at his headquarters in the Russian Concession, he asked Ting to come into his room and help him. It was a very hot day, and from eleven in the morning they worked incessantly until three in the afternoon without a break. Sun had an unbelievably good constitution, as most of the revolutionary leaders had, and could have gone on working for another five hours without grumbling. But Ting began to feel thirsty and hungry, and looked around the room for something to drink and eat. His eyes alighted on a box in which were three small water melons, on a table in the inner corner of the room. His mouth watered. He went straight to the table, and as he had been sitting at his desk for so long without stretching his legs, he felt stiff and walked unsteadily. Leaning

on the table, he reached out his hand for the melons, and asked

"Would you like a melon? I'm going to have a bite"

"Oh, no," shouted Sun, jumping up from his seat to stop him.

But before he could be stopped, he had picked up one with his shaking hand. It was extremely heavy for a water melon, and with his usual carelessness he let it drop on the table. It began to roll across the table and in a second would drop on the ground.

"Catch it! Oh, no! Lie down on the ground!" Sun called out frantically and dropped down flat on the ground himself

It was too late to catch it, and Ting's instinctive sense of self-preservation made him lie on the ground just as the bomb exploded with a deafening bang. One explosion led to two more and the room became a mass of ruins.

Strange to relate, Ting, who was nearer to the explosive, escaped major injury, only receiving numerous slight cuts and losing three fingers, while Sun, who was much farther away, was in a critical state. He remained unconscious for many hours and was hurriedly carried by his comrades to a private house nearby which belonged to a Russian friend of his. While they were hastening to remove important documents from the partly wrecked building, the police arrived and three comrades were arrested. The Viceroy's men soon followed, and all the property was seized. This included the bulk of their ready money in notes and silver, all the small firearms and ammunition yet to be distributed, and the membership registers. From the documents seized they discovered the addresses of several other secret offices, and among them Ta Tung's publicity department. Facilities were immediately granted to the Viceroy's men by the British Authorities, and a strong body of Chinese Guards, accom-

panied by Chinese policemen belonging to the British Concession, dashed to Ta Tung's printing house and surrounded the place.

They found it already deserted. Ta Tung and his men had managed to pack their important documents and leave the building shortly before the arrival of the guards and police. But it was to Ta Tung's great grief that he had to leave all the printed matter to be seized. While the building was being searched by the authorities, nearly all the people in the neighbourhood and practically all the passers-by stayed to watch the show. The guards and policemen, who were mostly illiterate, played havoc with piles and piles of printed papers. They took some away to report to their chief, and kicked and threw the rest about. The street in front of the house was littered with papers, and children began to pick them up and collect them. Among the onlookers there were a few men who, being revolutionaries, were ordered to mix with the crowd in order to spy on the guards and police while they were searching the building. When they saw that the search was ended and only one man was posted there to keep watch, they went back to tell Ta Tung that his marvellous work had now come to naught. While he was almost heart-broken, some of his comrades were not sure whether they were not gratified in their heart of hearts at seeing this clear proof of Ta Tung's folly in preparing the publicity matter in such an extravagant way.

The marching off of the Sixteenth Brigade Infantry, and Old Chu with them, on whom so much depended, had been a severe enough blow to the revolutionaries, and the bomb accident, happening just a week before they were going to strike, was the shattering of their fondest hope. Their leader, Sun Wu, was still in a state of coma, and now they had neither money nor arms. All the responsible members were gathered at the house of the Russian sym-

pathiser, and they conferred with and questioned each other at Sun's bedside. What was to be done? They even lacked sufficient means to get away if further pressure was brought to bear on them. Never before had they had to face a worse situation and everybody was at his wits' end. Ta Tung, who had been pacing up and down the room, at last said:

"We are in a difficult position, as we all realise. But it seems to me that there are greater things at stake than we imagine. Our lives are but a small matter compared with the future of the revolution. I grieve with you, and perhaps more than any of you, at the loss of our arms and munitions, of our money, and, above all, of the entire stock of our publicity material . . ."

He looked at some of his comrades, for he seemed to have heard a snigger or two at his mention of publicity material.

"But the most serious and fatal loss of all is the register of members. All the names of our new recruits in the Eighth Division of the New Army are now in the Viceroy's hands, and many thousands of our new brothers will probably be put under arrest as soon as the Viceroy's order reaches the Hupeh and Szechuan border . . ."

"There are two or three hundred in the Fifteenth Brigade, mostly recruited by General Tao. They are all in Wu-Chang," said someone who knew the books well.

"And General Tao is still working at it. I bet at this very moment he is signing them on, not knowing that all is gone," said another who had made entries from Tao's list.

"But we must never say all is gone till none of us is left. Now there is no choice left open to us. We must make a die-or-succeed effort to recover the books which must be in the Viceroy's hands now. Let us storm his Yamen as soon as we get all our men together. I can tell my brethren

to be ready in a few hours. If we succeed in breaking into the Yamen and getting hold of him, all will be well, otherwise . . . no, there is no otherwise!"

"But where are our munitions?" one asked.

"Our white arm bands, which were to be given to our men, have been confiscated," said another.

"We have our Brownings, and each one has a few rounds of shot . . ." Ta Tung said.

"And the guards at the Yamen have endless supplies of bullets for their rifles Reflect a little, you idealist!" someone exclaimed

"That I know. But this is no time for reflection There is nothing else we can do. As for the arm bands, we must use a white handkerchief instead. We cannot inform our members that because the arm bands are lost we cannot fight and tell them to flee. And if we do, our cause will be lost. Nobody, however strongly they hate the Manchus, will dare to trust us again. We shall be cursed by the people and even after our death, condemned by historians "

The others were silent.

"Let us see how many men we can gather, and how many pistols and bullets we still have."

They knew that everybody had his pistol with him, and a number of boxes of bullets had been removed from the various secret branches before they were raided. Counting every man, many of whom had been proved poor marksmen and some very bad fighters, they were about a hundred strong. As most of them had been ordered to disperse for safety, there was no way of communicating with the majority of them until the next morning. So it was decided to storm the Viceroy's Yamen at dusk on the following evening. Ta Tung was nominated and selected as the temporary acting leader, and sat down at once to map out their grand strategy.

It was a very simple undertaking. They just had to carry all their bullets with them and make straight for the Viceroy in his Yamen. It would be a one way traffic once started, there was no retreat. They must conquer the Viceroy and make the whole Province obey them, or they must perish.

There was no road of supply or way of retreat to plan out. Ta Tung was a keen map-reader, and throughout the small hours of the morning he and his comrades selected nine different roads to approach the Yamen. Word was also to be sent to General Tao, ordering him to inform all his recruits that dusk was the time to start and they were expected to join in as soon as they could. As for the members in the Sixteenth Brigade, they could not be informed beforehand. If the attack on the Yamen were to succeed, it would not be too late to issue an order recalling all the men, and there was no necessity to provide anything if they failed. As they retired after they had sworn to die or live together, Ta Tung could not help remarking:

"I wish we had some posters and handbills to be put up and distributed as we start on our way. They would bring the public to our side"

When he was alone, he wrote a letter to Lotus Fragrance. He did not say that this would probably be his last letter, but he told her of his undying love for her, which he said was something no power on earth could cause to perish. He could not bear to write more. It was a very short letter. As usual, he addressed it care of Mrs Hou of the Guild Hostel. To his Uncle Kang, who had come back to Nanchang from Kan-Chow, he merely sent a message of four words. It read "Tzu Yu Wan Shui" (Long live Liberty)

In the quietness of the early morning he sat alone to reflect on the life he had led. It was, he thought, quite

uneventful. He had so far accomplished nothing. He was ambitious, but not in the narrow sense of the word. His hope was to see the destruction of what he hated and the establishment of what he loved. This had proved too great an ambition for him. Perhaps he would never see the day when this would happen. However, he believed he had chosen the right path, he was sure that many others would follow when he had passed away. Formerly, whenever he was setting out on a risky undertaking, he could not help feeling sorry for his wife, to whom he thought he had brought little happiness but plenty of worry. At times he had even thought of putting everything aside and escaping to that deserted island on the far distant coast of the South Sea, to live a life of absolute retirement with Lotus Fragrance. But then he would have a guilty conscience. He would be a deserter. Neither he nor she would have a moment of peace if he were to feel like a deserter.

He went to see Ting, who had just heard of the decision and was very glad of it. He said to Ta Tung:

“Feeling much stronger. Let me follow you.”

“No. You have bled too much. Rest here and don’t move.”

He had a lot of things to say to Ting, but seeing the paleness of his face, he looked at him for a moment in silence, and walked away.

The onlookers had stayed for a long time outside Ta Tung’s headquarters after the search-party had gone. Some of them who were well-educated could not help admiring the extraordinarily good calligraphy and excellent literary style of the “Declaration of Liberty” leaflet. Others who were less so began to appreciate the printing, the paper and the attractiveness of the handbills. Those who could read were more or less moved by its contents, and those who could not read asked the others for its mean-

ing. Also a few copies of Ta Tung's folder of verses were picked up, and found their way to the eyes of connoisseurs. Men of taste were loud in their praise, and they immediately became the most treasured piece of literary work in the city. Such news spread from mouth to mouth, and collectors of books, literary men, teachers and students began to make the journey to the British Concession to look for these papers. As there were plenty of them in the building, the policeman who was keeping watch at the place let people help themselves freely, and a large number of copies of the Declaration were distributed in this way.

There were many other people who came specially for the folder, and as the supply of this was very small, it soon became exhausted. Luckily for the policeman, a seller of rare books offered a small bribe to him and asked him to find all the copies of the folder left in the building. The policeman was a shrewd business-man, and he put away half of them, only giving to the book dealer the other half, which had been trampled on and many of them badly soiled. Any subsequent visitor asking specially for the folder was engaged in friendly conversation by the policeman, who, until a nice little tip was received, would only smile and say:

"It is very difficult to find a copy now. People are paying high prices for them in rare book shops."

Once they were not to be had for the asking their value immediately started to rise. Soon the bookseller made a second visit to the place and begged the man to look carefully to see if he could find a few more copies. He offered to pay at the rate of a few cents per copy. The policeman knew the way the second-hand booksellers did their business. They seldom made a profit of less than five hundred per cent, so he asked for fifty cents per copy and it was immediately agreed to

As the Declaration was also in great demand, though nobody had so far offered any money for it, he began to see that he could make a small fortune out of it if he acted discreetly and secretly. He immediately stopped giving people free copies. Instead of hinting for a tip from every man who made a request to him, he made a deal with a newspaper boy at the corner of the street. The boy undertook to sell them for him at a copper per copy and receive a commission of twenty per cent of the price.

That was only the beginning of the trade. Business soon became so good that the boy had to take partners to help him. By the next morning a dozen newsboys were kept running to and from the wholesaler for additional supplies. It became the talk of the town, and people were now willing to pay ten times the price the policeman had asked. All the newspapers had reported the accident in the Russian Concession and the searching of the various headquarters of the revolutionaries, and had darkly hinted at the beautifully produced Declaration of Rebellion, as it was officially called. As the contents of such outrageous documents were naturally censored, people were most eager to get a copy. It was an authentic document and therefore more reliable and valuable than any newspaper, which could at most only make some reference to it.

The Viceroy heard of it, and sent for a sample copy from the Captain of the Guards, who had seized some. When he saw it, he immediately put a ban on it. This ban was a perfect advertisement for it and was, of course, non-effective in foreign concessions in Hankow until the Consulates of the various countries had been informed and requested to comply with the Viceroy's wish and had agreed to do so, by which time it was sold out. In spite of the ban many copies found their way into Wu-Chang, where the local printers pirated it and sold it in secret at a great profit. By the end of the day few people in these

three cities had not a copy Even the ladies in the Viceroy's Yamen sent servants out to buy it for them. Ta Tung had never dreamed that his verses would be sold at such a high price and that his leaflet would be so popular.

In the meantime the newspapers reported that the names of all the "rebels" were now known to the Viceroy, who might at any time order their arrest Actually he wanted to arrest all the rebels immediately, and on glancing over the entries in the register was both enraged and horrified to see that a large part of the rank and file of the New Army was in it He sent for General Chang Piao and demanded that he should clear his army of rebels. He threw the book to the General to indicate his displeasure at the end of the interview.

General Chang could not possibly arrest half of his men in the Sixteenth Brigade Even the number of rebels in his Fifteenth Brigade was too big for them to be arrested in one day. He did not know what to do and assembled his officers for a lecture on the following day He had not thought yet what to say to them. Among the revolutionaries whom he had already arrested he picked out three at random and had them executed as a warning to the others He wanted them to know that he was going to apply stern measures to them.

General Tao, the cook-private, had been very busy with his recruiting work up to the time that it was in every newspaper that all the headquarters of the China Union Society had been searched by the authorities, that the register of membership had been found and that many arrests had been made. He was stupefied and looked at his new comrades with a sour face Like his Commander-in-Chief, he knew not what to do When the news of the execution of the three revolutionaries became known to the men who had recently joined the Society, everyone felt his turn would soon come

Early in the afternoon of the 19th (October 10th, 1911, later known as the Double Tenth Festival Day) a hundred men crowded together to take their oath before starting for the revolution. Ta Tung saw that it was hopeless to expect Sun Wu to recover sufficiently to take the chair on this solemn occasion. He had ordered two comrades to stay behind and look after Sun and Ting, and later, when Wu was better, to take them to Shanghai, where there were quite a lot of members

"Comrades, we are now going to embark on a dangerous journey," Ta Tung began, "to which many of us have become quite accustomed. But there is this difference between this and former times. We have always before been able to retreat if we failed. This time we are going to fight 'with our backs to the water', as our ancient General Han Shin did 'Life comes to you only when death is hot at your heels,' he said to his men. His immortal backs-to-the-water battle was a complete victory. We are going to cross the Yangtze River soon and there is no turning back. If we win, all is well, and if we die, our cause is saved. Our brethren and posterity will be able to hold up their heads and be proud of our sacrifice. If a single man among us surrenders or escapes, our enemy will be able to say: 'They would all have done like him if they had had the chance to get away.' Remember the liberty of our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and dear ones depends on us. I call upon all here, let us make our oath and go!"

Some went with a heavy heart, and some smiled and felt cheerful as usual, but they all realised there was little or no chance of coming back alive. It was "win or die", with a hundred to one on "die". Yet, in spite of their full knowledge of this, they felt they were in honour bound to see it through, and the sooner the better.

They had to leave early, as the crossing of the River

would take some time, and they had to be ready at various places to await the signal. To avoid suspicion by the police, they had to take the ferry in small groups of threes and fives at different times.

Ta Tung was one of the first to go. He and three others went up the famous Yellow Crane Tower and settled themselves down as tea and wine drinking customers of the restaurant on the top floor. The place was not so crowded as usual, and on the walls all around were posted a number of bills with these four characters, "Mu Tan Kuo Shih" ("Don't talk Nation's affairs"—Nation's affairs meaning politics). The waiter serving them was a chatty and cheerful person, and Ta Tung asked him, pointing to the ugly bills:

"What does that mean, partner?"

"That is posted by order of our boss, sir. Many people, sir, after a cup or two of weak wine, would lose their heads and begin to talk about things they shouldn't speak of in public, sir. Our place is frequented by plain-clothes guards, sir . . ." and he looked around to make sure that there were not any about at that time, "and a lot of people have recently been arrested here, sir."

"How do you feel about it, partner?"

"I sympathise with those poor men, sir, but I don't talk . . ."

"But you are now, partner"

"To you, sir, I know it's all right"

"We may be plain-clothes men, partner . . ."

"No, sir, we know them by sight . . ."

"Good! Please tell us if they come in, partner. We want to burn the Viceroy's Yamen tonight, and nobody must know it beforehand," Ta Tung said jokingly.

The waiter roared with laughter.

"Don't laugh, partner. Look, here comes our kerosene"

He pointed to two men who had just come in. They

had with them two big square tins of kerosene in an oblong wooden box.

The newcomers took the joke and joined in the laughter while they sat down at a table near the cashier's office.

"People who do these things don't talk about them, sir "

The waiter hurried on with his work for he had to serve the others

In former times the place would have been crowded with people until late at night, but because of the ten o'clock curfew law recently enforced in view of the critical situation threatened by the revolutionaries, the few customers began to disperse long before dusk. As Ta Tung's party and a few others showed no signs of leaving but sat there eating, drinking and joking, the cashier began to get uneasy and sent the waiter to hurry them. The waiter apologised for the cashier, saying that the old man wanted to get home to his wife and children before dark, and asked them to pay for their fare now. He said he did not mind staying longer to serve them with hot water for their tea if they had no wish to leave early. This they all did, and the old man was glad to be able to go away immediately.

It was three days after the full moon, which now seemed to be as shy as a newly-married maiden, unwilling to show her winsome face in public. Before she peeped from behind the eastern horizon at the good earth and the mighty silver river, Ta Tung and his men were opening their tins of kerosene and spreading the contents all over the restaurant.

"Hey, what are you people doing?" the waiter shouted

"Setting the place on fire, so that our brothers will know now it is time to start," Ta Tung answered

"Are you really going to attack the Viceroy's Yamen?"

"Of course!"

"I'm with you!" the man shouted with determination

"When I read the Declaration of Liberty this morning, I knew something would happen soon. I wanted to join you, but did not know how. I'd like to have a look at my boss's face when he sees this!"

"How did you manage to get a copy of my declaration?" Ta Tung was pleased beyond words.

"Oh, everybody has seen it, sir. Thousands and thousands of copies were sold."

"Sold? Ha!" Ta Tung felt he was in the Ninth Heaven.

"In secret, you know, sir. The Viceroy banned it."

He helped them to set the place alight

They hurried down the staircase, tied a white handkerchief on each of their arms, and took out their pistols. Ta Tung realised that they had no spare arms for the waiter, and said

"Tie a handkerchief on each arm, like us, and come with me, partner. If I fall, take my pistol. Carry these bullets for me."

The man raised his right arm to show that he had a big iron fire-poker in his hand

"Never mind, sir. I have this with me," he shouted, and tied a handkerchief on each arm.

Ta Tung had thirteen men with him, and the waiter made them up to fifteen. Glancing over his little party to see that all were there, he shouted

"To the Viceroy's Yamen! Advance!"

"Kill! Kill!" The waiter was intoxicated with enthusiasm. He rushed forward like a whirlwind, followed by the others

"Tie a white handkerchief on your arms and follow us," the waiter shouted.

At first they were but a handful of madmen dashing along the main streets still full of passers-by, shouting all the time, fired at by the guards who were posted here and there, but only occasionally answering fire with fire. But

soon many people were following them, all with handkerchiefs on their arms, and all running at top speed. Some of them might have been people who had read the Declaration and were in sympathy with them, but it would be over-rating the effect of those publicity documents to think that all men would unhesitatingly risk their lives immediately after just having a glimpse of the paper. In the busy street, as they shouted and ran, a few men had slipped away, but many others had rushed forward to find out what it was really about. A few wildly aimed bullets flying over their heads sent some people back but did not really decrease their numbers. In fact, as they ran along shouting, more and more people joined in.

The mob had no love for the guards and, incensed by their interference, they began to shout "Kill the guards" as they rushed forward. Isolated policemen and guards, seeing such a wild scene, threw away their arms and hid, and many were overpowered by people who were armed with nothing but their bare fists. As the mob grew bigger and bigger, shouting more and more, and feeling their strength greater and greater by disarming and killing guards and policemen on their way, they began to lose their reason and sense of safety, and became utterly wild and uncontrollable. In the meantime, fire had broken out in eight other different places, and the whole sky was aflame with a crimson hue. Shots were heard from various quarters. With rifles and bullets wrenched from the guards and policemen, the mob fired wildly, making straight for the Viceroy's Yamen.

Like raging waves, like a falling avalanche, like a sand-storm, they surged forward, sweeping away any obstacle in their way. Though most of the people had by now grabbed some kind of weapon in their hands, for whenever they passed a shop selling household utensils they would help themselves freely to anything that could be

used to knock out their enemy, or if they passed any blacksmith's or a coppersmith's, such shops were immediately emptied, yet many of the men were still empty-handed. But they had killed many policemen and guards, and every man felt himself invincible. Thus they met with little resistance until they drew near the Yamen.

From eight other points, eight similar mobs, started and formed in exactly the same manner, were all rushing to the same destination. As the distances had been well chosen, they all arrived in the vicinity of the Yamen at approximately the same time. These mobs joined together before they reached the outer enclosure of the Yamen and, shouting and firing, they dashed into the extensive courtyard.

The guards stationed there to protect the Yamen had been ordered to hold fire until the courtyard was half full of people. When the signal was given, volleys of bullets were fired and men dropped dead by scores. Those in front started to try and turn back, but they were helplessly pushed forward by the numerous blind supporters behind, and corpse was actually piled upon corpse until the courtyard looked like a box of sardines. Yet still people pushed forward, trampling and falling over dead or half-dead bodies. When the guards saw that apparently nothing could stop the mob, they withdrew hurriedly into the Yamen and closed and barricaded the gates. As they tried in vain to force the strong, massive gates, the charge of the mob gradually changed into a kind of trench warfare. Heads or parts of heads appeared here and there over the front wall of the Yamen and shots were fired singly upon the crowd. Those who had guns promptly answered back, and though most of the firing from the crowd was wide of the mark, some of the revolutionaries were very accurate with their pistols. Firing from both sides soon became more and more discreet, and there seemed to come a lull. While those who were under the

porch, being well protected by the roof, continued trying to force the gates, those who were in the courtyard began to seek places of shelter from the firing from over the wall. They stooped or lay behind piles of dead, and exchanged fire with the enemy upon the wall.

After a short time some of the revolutionaries realised that they would very soon be without bullets, and began to use them more sparingly, while their enemy, on the contrary, intensified his fire as more and more men appeared over the wall. It seemed there was no way of breaking down the gates, which were protected with iron plates and were fireproof. All would soon be lost. And to think so many lives had been sacrificed!

When Ta Tung threw away his empty pistol and grasped a knife left on the ground by some dying supporter, he felt very calm as he realised that the end must be near. He much regretted that, with the extraordinary good luck of having his Declaration widely distributed—which perhaps somewhat accounted for the big following they had—they were going to fail again. But he was content. He and his comrades had done what they ought to do. Perhaps some day others would succeed where he and his comrades had failed.

Just then the sound of thunder was heard. Good Heavens! Was it artillery fire? Yes, it was true. Cannon-shells whizzed by and landed in the neighbourhood. Why, there it went, again and again, and each time the shells dropped nearer to the Yamen. It was too good to be true! The Artillery regiment of the Fifteenth Brigade must have joined them.

The crowd took fresh courage at the sound of the artillery fire. By this time ladders had been obtained from nearby, and they were prepared to climb over the wall. In the meantime people in the courtyard began to shout

to the defenders to surrender. But they were only answered by intensified fire In the brilliant moonlight Ta Tung saw the first man to climb up a ladder. What a brave man! He had already been wounded in the arm, for he was climbing with one hand only, while the other hung down limply. As the figure appeared above the wall, he seemed to recognise it as one very familiar to him Yes, it was Ting, good Ting Ho-San, who had been left in Hankow because of his wounds As he was climbing over the wall a bullet struck him and he fell back on the man following him, nearly knocking him off his feet and the ladder. Ta Tung rushed forward, shouting to the people on the ladder to pass him gently down.

"Ho-San! Ho-San!" Ta Tung called out as he helped to lay him down at the foot of the wall "Why did you come?"

"Feel . . . happier . . to be . . here . . than to stay . . . behind"

At this very moment a general outburst of cries of triumph and joy was heard above the noise of firing. Ta Tung knew something unexpected had happened He felt that he must leave his suffering companion and attend to his duty He looked around, and saw that while his men were still trying to scale the wall the gates were opened and the guards surrendered. In spite of the continued shelling, people started to rush into the Yamen, yelling wildly "Kill the Manchus! Kill the Manchus!"

But the Viceroy was gone. He had escaped through a side door during the early stages of the battle, and so had his family It was partly because his absence was known to the guards that they surrendered The guards had not suffered many casualties Ta Tung, who wanted to restore order in the city immediately, told the officers to take off their shoulder straps and all of them, officers and men, to tie a white handkerchief on each arm. They were

made to swear loyalty to the revolution and were promised that no vengeance would be demanded on them.

In the meantime the Arms and Munition Store House, the Provincial Prison, the official Bank and all the other public offices were taken over, and all the arrested comrades were released. It was known later that the Eighth Battalion of Engineers, most of whom were members of the Society, for fear of being arrested and executed in view of the incident which had happened the day before, had started a mutiny at the sight of the fire breaking out in the city. Then almost the whole of the Fifteenth Brigade of Infantrymen, killing most of their officers, had also joined in. The Artillerymen immediately began to shell the Viceroy's Yamen. The Commander-in-Chief, General Chang Piao, had by then disappeared, so they re-named themselves "The People's Army", with no other insignia than the white handkerchief.

While Ta Tung was leading the guards to help the firemen put out the fires which were still burning, the leaders of "The People's Army", anxious to have a commander-in-chief who would command respect and was yet at the same time kindly, went to the private house of Li Yuan-Hung, the Brigadier-General of the Fifteenth Brigade, to ask him to join the revolution. He was nicknamed "Li, the Buddha", would not hurt a fly, and definitely was the best-natured man who ever entered the Army. He, already disguised as a civilian, was ready to flee when they broke into his house. He hid under his concubine's bed, but was dragged out by his well-wishers to be offered the post of Commander-in-Chief of the People's Army and head of the Military Government to be set up at once. Though later on he became the Vice President and subsequently the President of the Chinese Republic, he was extremely modest and utterly unambitious. According to his own words, he was "demanded by a band of soldiers

who surrounded and searched the house". He was "captured and lectured at, with guns and rifles around". "If I had disobeyed," he wrote to his former teacher, who was sent by the Manchus to fight him and whom he tried to persuade to surrender, "my head and my body would have separated immediately Hung had to consent temporarily."

Members of the China Union Society were alarmed at this They all thought that nobody but Ta Tung should be made the head of this Government They wanted to quarrel with the soldiers and denounce the election of "Li, the Buddha" as invalid. They tried to find Ta Tung, but hearing of this he had disappeared

After a night of horror, the new day dawned in peace and serenity. The bodies in the streets were speedily cleared away and buried in a big common grave on the Islet of Parrot Order was restored immediately. People went about attending to their business as usual as if nothing had happened, and in many foreign countries the press reported that a bloodless revolution had taken place in China As the foreigners had not seen the piles and piles of corpses nor known that all the coffins in the city were sold out in the morning, and all they saw was clearly swept streets and the remains of some burnt-out houses, they presumed that what they heard was right.

However, there were a few foreigners who knew how much blood was shed in this misleadingly-called "bloodless revolution". But they belonged to the silent kind of mission to China Doctors and nurses in the missionary hospitals had a very strenuous time, and as usual, they did whatever they could for the masses and left the talking to others These excellent people believe that action speaks louder than words, but alas! the 20th Century is the age of noise, and he who speaks the loudest triumphs Numerous golden deeds by these public-

spirited and self-denying men and women were left untold and unsung. It is only in the hearts of those whom they have cured and saved or tried to cure that one could find their records.

To the International Red Cross Hospital in Wuchang which was established by people of various nationalities with doctors and nurses mostly from England and America, came Ta Tung, for whom nearly the whole city was looking. He was not wounded but was engaged in a fruitless quest. He had been to every other hospital in the city trying to find out if Ting was there. Never giving up hope, he asked the matron of this place

"Have you here a young man who misses three fingers on his right hand and had a bullet passed through his left shoulder?"

The kindly lady consulted all the records and at last found the one thus indicated.

"Yes. Come with me. But I am afraid his case is hopeless. He had bled too much."

In a common ward surrounded by numerous other casualties he found Ting, lying on one of those beds hurriedly made with two narrow pieces of pine boards. He already looked like a corpse.

"Ho-San . . ." Ta Tung called out.

"Don't shout so loud," the matron warned him. "He has been delirious for some time and is now quiet. His end cannot be very far off."

Ta Tung could scarcely bear to look at him. His eyes were closed, his cheeks hollow and skin dried up. He breathed but very feebly. He moved his lips slightly and seemed to be trying to say something. The nurse in charge said

"Since the operation this morning the patient has been crying in incoherent sentences. The doctor said the bullet touched too near to his heart and there was no hope. He

cried again and again that he wanted to go on an island
He didn't know what he was saying, you see "

Ta Tung now perceived that the movement of Ting's lips indicated that he wanted to say the word 'island'.

"I think I understand what is his dying wish."

He stayed by his side until the end at last arrived, and then tried in vain to get a coffin. The matron, hearing that Ta Tung wanted to carry Ting's remains to Kwangtung, suggested that the best thing to do would be a cremation, in which case even the difficulty of transportation would be solved. Reluctantly Ta Tung had to agree to her proposal, and while he was busying himself in this matter, Li Yuan-Hung was formally installed as the head of the newly formed revolutionary government in Wuchang.

Whether "Li, the Buddha's" name worked miracles, or whether there were other reasons is immaterial, but it is historically true that he issued orders which were obeyed by everyone. The triple cities of Wu-Han were regarded as having "restored their brilliance" and in a month's time a dozen Provinces declared their independence, hoisting the Republican flag and sending representatives to Wu-Chang to attend a Conference of the Allied Provinces.

The child Emperor, with his nominal Mother, the Empress Dowager, widow of the late Emperor, did not know what to do. The Regent knew and cared more about theatres and restaurants in Peking than he did about affairs of state. In this moment of desperation they turned to a man whom they had, less than three years ago, put into disgrace. Yuan Shih-kai was appointed the new Vice-roy of Hupeh and Hunan to supersede Jui Chen, who had deserted from his duty. Was Yuan going to fight the Revolutionaries to recover these Provinces for the Manchu Court? No, not he! The appointment was like promising to lend a friend two ingots of gold with which robbers had just run away. Would the friend appreciate the kind-

ness, let alone a friend who had been recently turned out?

However, Yuan was ambitious and he bargained for power. He knew he would get it. He was appointed Prime Minister, with sweeping powers and a new cabinet at his suggestion. He asked for money. He wanted twelve million taels of silver for the army which he was to lead. The treasury was empty, but he knew he would get it. The Empress Dowager gave him, from her private purse, eighty thousand taels of gold and the rest was made up by other members of the Royal family. But would Yuan fight after he had obtained what he wanted? No, not Yuan! He ordered his subordinate officers in the army to sign a telegram saying that they would lead all the troops back to Peking to explain to the members of the Royal family and the ministers who wanted war, the seriousness of the consequences.

While Yuan was bargaining for power and money, a man who had an utter disregard for these two things was travelling the road to fame and power in spite of himself. Dr Sun Yat-Sen, who said the success of this revolution was a mere accident, came home from abroad and was elected the first Provisional President of China. On the 13th day of the 11th moon he took office, and adopted the Western calendar. It was January the 1st of the 1st year of the Chinese Republic (January 1st, 1912).

But there was another man who cared as little for power, fame and money as Dr Sun Ta Tung, after staying secretly in Hankow for a few days to wait for the cremation of Ting Ho-San's remains, which he wanted to carry to the deserted island in the South Sea, soon started on his journey. The Republic was now established. The Manchus, though still existing in name, had actually not an inch of ground to stand on. He had fulfilled his ambition, and as the days went by, he became

more and more disillusioned. He began to see that the transition period was made for opportunists and also tended to make opportunists. When France, a much smaller nation, was undergoing this kind of political change, that country was in a state of chaos for a great number of years, and many opportunists flourished and died. He was not made for such a period. He must go.

For the first time in his life he felt lonely, extremely lonely. He longed for the company of his wife, Lotus Fragrance, whom he began to miss terribly. He could not go to Peking, and she could not come South. The South and North were supposed to be at war. He had no real home, but Li Kang's house was the place he regarded as home. His Uncle Kang was approaching the age of eighty, and how happy the old man must be now that he saw the Republic was at last established! He had not seen his uncle for seventeen years, and he knew his uncle loved him more than he did his own son. As Kiangsi had already adhered to the Republic, he must dash home first. It was on his way to Canton and then Hai-An, where he was going to stay, waiting for Lotus Fragrance to join him when it was convenient for her to travel. He also ought to pay his respects to the graves of the great-aunt and his aunt, who had died years ago, and to see Ta Yu, for whom he had a brotherly feeling, but his main and ardent desire was to see his aged uncle.

The signs of war were everywhere, on the Yangtze, where troops were being moved here and there, and in the ports and cities where fire had left its scars. Nanchang was only slightly touched, but the old city, which was dear to his heart and which he had seen a thousand times with his mind's eye during these past years, seemed totally different from what it used to be, or rather what he thought it to be. The streets were much narrower than

he remembered and spacious public places which he knew so well seemed to have shrunk beyond recognition. The atmosphere seemed to be dirty and choking and he hurried to make for the country.

As the Village of the Li Families gradually appeared above the horizon he became more and more impatient. He had always kept with him the volume of Po Chu-I's poems which he had bought in a book-shop in Peking. He had not paid much for it, but it was the best printed and bound edition which existed of this poet's works. He knew his uncle would like it. He personally did not care about the binding, but he had always carried it with him whenever he could, wrapped up and placed under his pillow or at the bottom of his case, and it was one of the few things he had not lost in the much hurried evacuation in Hankow. He had kept it in excellent condition, and never soiled it with his fingers, though he liked to read Po's poems. He felt for this book in his small parcel and looked forward to the moment when he would see the happy sparkle in the old man's eyes which appeared whenever such a treasure was found.

It was towards evening. The autumn sun was displaying its last rays through a few scattered patches of cloud against the azure sky. As Ta Tung looked around in the firmament he could see the canopy of Heaven with colours of blue, white, yellow, golden, orange, red and purple. Underneath such a gallery of colours, the familiar view of the village, with its selfsame trees, roofs, walls, water ponds, patches of ricefields, and even the haystacks, which seemed to be the very ones which he had seen so often in his youth, came back quickly into his eyes. Then came the barking of the dogs, he could almost swear that he recognised some of them, though he realised that the dogs he knew had died long ago. Oh, what happiness it gives the heart to revisit the old haunts of one's childhood after

so many years' absence! And to see again people one so dearly loves!

The outer gates of the old building were decayed and looked depressing. But what was hanging above the entrance frame? Was it a long and broad piece of hempen cloth to indicate a death in the family? Yes, blue lanterns were there too! Tears welled up in his eyes as he entered the big courtyard. Above the secondary doors on the left, the same things appeared. His step slackened, and then he could hardly go on. Very slowly and with a sinking heart he went into the house, and knelt in front of the middle chamber where Li Kang's coffin was placed. He wanted to cry aloud, but he had lost his voice. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He had a thousand things to tell his uncle, and now they had transformed themselves into teardrops, which perhaps spoke more eloquently than words.

An old woman of the village was the only person in the house. She had known Ta Tung as a boy but could not recognise him now. She told him that Li Kang had died only a few days ago. Ta Yu, she said, had joined the army at the outbreak of the revolution, and did not yet know of the death of his father.

EPILOGUE

"The Bridge of Heaven is sometimes the Gateway to Hell"

AN ancient historian has told us a story of the snipe and the oyster.

"While an oyster was having a sunbath, a snipe pecked at its flesh. The oyster closed its shells and caught the snipe's bill. 'Today, there is no rain,' said the snipe (who

is supposed to know the weather in advance), ‘and to-morrow there will be no rain. There will be a dead oyster.’ ‘Today, there will be no way out,’ retorted the oyster, ‘and tomorrow there will be no way out. There will be a dead snipe.’ As the two were engaged in this deadlock, a fisherman was able to catch them both ”

As the revolutionaries were doing their utmost to overthrow the Manchus and the Manchus were willing to give everything to defeat the revolution, Yuan Shih-Kai reaped the same benefit as the fisherman in the story. He would not move a step before he had obtained everything he wanted from the Manchu Court, and when he had obtained it, he merely gave the revolutionary army (which was hurriedly organised and equipped, and under the command of “Li, the Buddha” who was reputed to be the kindest of men and consequently the worst of soldiers) no more than a taste of his strength by re-occupying Hankow and Han-Yang, leaving them to draw their own conclusion as to when he would complete his victory by crossing the river and taking Wuchang which he continued to bombard. Next, he appointed an emissary to meet his enemies’ representative, not to demand their surrender, which he was well in a position to do, but to negotiate a peaceful and honourable settlement which could be accepted by both parties. The Emperor was to abdicate but to be treated still as an Emperor within his purple forbidden Palace. The rest of the Empire was to become a republic to be established on democratic principles. As for himself, he was very modest. He had only one small and personal request. For his splendid service to the old regime, whose face he had saved, and for his gracious attitude towards the revolutionaries, whose defeat he did not want to see, he merely wished to be rewarded by the nomination of himself as the First President of the Chinese Republic.

To his generous suggestion, while all the ungrateful members of the Imperial Family and the ministers of the Manchu Court in Peking emphatically said 'no', the helpless widow Empress Dowager and her adopted child the Emperor said 'yes', and while all the ministers and supporters of the newly formed Provisional Government in Nanking said 'no', Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the President himself, said 'yes'. So long as the Manchus were gone and a republic was established, he was content and would not stand in the way. As soon as the Emperor abdicated, he would resign and see to the nomination and election of Yuan as President.

Before the miserable widow and her adopted child could have a happy new year, Yuan memorialised to the Throne advising the abdication. "Had the King of France, at the time of the French Revolution, followed sagacious advice, it could never have happened that every single descendant of the Louis has perished." Those timely kind words had immediate effect. At the last Imperial conference, the Emperor cried bitterly for a second time in his short career. But this time the Empress Dowager wept more bitterly than he did. According to a historian of the period, that conference resembled a funeral. "The Empress sobbed and her tears flowed, all the Princes and Ministers wept loud and long. Finally the Empress Dowager said to the Emperor 'The fact that you are still alive today is entirely due to the excellent service of your great minister Yuan,' and she ordered the Emperor to come down from his Imperial Throne to thank the great minister Yuan. The great minister Yuan, trembling and knocking his head on the ground, refused to be thanked, and keeping his head down and weeping, was unable to raise his face."

On the 25th of the 12th moon of the 3rd year of Hsuan Tung, the day following the Chinese Lesser New Year's

Festival (February 12th, 1912), the Imperial Edict for abdication was issued. On the following day, true to his promise, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen resigned and saw to the nomination and unanimous election by the Representatives of all the seventeen Provinces who were in Nanking, of Yuan Shih-Kai as the First President of the Chinese Republic. For his Vice President, Yuan could not find a more suitable person than "Li, the Buddha", who, it must be remembered, was the choice of the revolutionaries. In the early days of democracy, many ironical things happened. General Tao, the cook private before the revolution, became a very popular figure under Li's command, and was rapidly promoted to the rank of Colonel. Later, he was appointed Commander of Li's bodyguards, and when Yuan died and Li succeeded as the President, Tao actually acquired the rank of Major-General, and seven of his elder brothers, who had formerly ill-treated him, came to Peking to their youngest brother, and all of them were sooner or later given commissions as Captains under him. Old Chu, the crack shot, did not live to see the Republic. When the men started a mutiny on hearing the news of the Wuchang outbreak, he, being conspicuous in his Captain's uniform, received one of the first bullets and was killed on the spot.

Now that the South and the North were united and peace was restored, Ta Tung sent a wire to Lotus Fragrance to tell her that he was ready to go, as they had agreed, to that heavenly island in the South Sea. Soon he received a reply saying that for a certain vital reason, which she could not explain on paper, much less by wire, she could not go there for a few years yet. If he would not come to Peking, she would leave Peking for Nanchang immediately.

Of course Ta Tung wired her to come at once, but he was puzzled. What was her vital reason? He recalled

that since Ting's mention of the island, she had never actually committed herself as to whether she could join him there. Was she afraid of its being haunted? Pure nonsense, as Ting said. And then he had clearly seen that she was no longer timid in that way. What could be her vital reason? There must be something she had not told him when he left Peking. He remembered that when his train was about to start from the station, she seemed to have some secret to impart to him, but the steam whistle blew and she must have changed her mind. For she only said that he must write to her frequently.

Her vital reason was in the person of Elegance Radiance, who, in her short school tunic and short school skirt, and with two short black plaits just behind her ears, was saying good-bye to her teachers and classmates in a girl's middle school in Peking. This was her second year. She was very sorry to have to leave some of the friends whom she had made here. She came out of the school gates for the last time with dewy eyes, but she was radiant again when she arrived home, which was a very short distance from the school. Skipping and smiling, she called out

"Mama, mama. I've come back. Where is the pâste, mama? I want to stick those photos in my album. I've got a lot more today."

Lotus Fragrance was packing. She turned and looked adoringly on her daughter as if she were seeing her for the first time after a long absence.

"So you have come back, Elegance Radiance. The paste is on my desk." She added philosophically "I hope you'll remember who's who, not merely collecting photos to fill your album as boys do with postage stamps. They only care for quantity."

Taking four albums from the shelf and putting them on her little desk at which she sat, Elegance Radiance said.

"No, mama. I do not want quantity. I select them very

carefully. If the photo does not look artistic, I don't stick it in. And if I know her to be a bad-egg, I won't put her in either."

"What did your teachers say to you when they heard you were leaving them for good?"

"My form teacher asked me if it was not because we were frightened by the recent mutiny of President Yuan's soldiers around Peking that you suddenly decided to return to Nanchang. The principal said the mutiny was staged by the President's command in order to show the Southerners that he could not leave Peking and that there was nothing to be afraid of. She said that the schools in the South were not half as good as those in Peking. She asked me if I would like to stay in the school as a boarder instead of going south with you, mama."

"Cynical people say that the Revolution is only a 'change of water but not of medicine', but I do see the difference. Before the Revolution, people were not so conceited and rude. In my schooldays, my teachers would only praise the good qualities of other schools while being modest about their own. Well, the Revolution has changed that. But what did you say to them, Elegance Radiance?"

"I said 'I don't know'."

"Why 'I don't know', Elegance Radiance? You are over thirteen and should know better than that. You ought to have said that you must go home to see our father whom you have never seen before!"

Elegance Radiance felt her work was much more interesting than the subject she was talking about.

"To tell you the truth, I'm looking forward to the journey much more than to seeing father." After a slight pause, she added apologetically "You see, I've never been out of Peking before, and my friends all say that fathers are not so good as mothers. Some even say they are dreadful things."

"Poor father!" Lotus Fragrance sighed. "And he doesn't even know of your existence."

"Why didn't you tell him, mama?"

"You would not understand"

"I would, mama I am a big girl now and ought to know things."

"Well, when he had to leave, you were not born. If I had told him, he would not have gone, and it was dangerous to stay here."

"But after he was gone, then certainly you should have told him, mama." She felt a little slighted.

"No He was doing some kind of work which might call on him to sacrifice his life. And if he had known of your existence, he might give up his dangerous work for something safe."

"And you don't want him to do safe work, mama?"

"He would feel miserable and wish he had not left his original work."

"Oh, I understand." In fact, she was more confused than before. She now thought she could not quite understand her mother either. Standing up, she tried to wipe her fingers with her handkerchief. But the paste stuck on her fingers was now dry, so she wet her fingers in her mouth. Then she rubbed them carelessly on her tunic.

"Stop it, Elegance Radiance," her mother said sternly
"Go and wash your hands if they are dirty. Your careless habits are exactly like your father's"

"But you often said I had your artistic taste, mama
Anyhow, I don't mind having some of father's unimportant bad habits, so long as I don't leave you as he did, mama, never coming back for thirteen years! I'll never leave you, mama!"

Whether the recent mutiny of Yuan's troops around Peking was staged by his order or not was difficult to say,

but it strengthened his argument that he could not be spared in the North and that while the new capital must be Nanking, the President was to stay in Peking. And to insure that such mishaps would never occur again, he created a military force in and about the city by establishing "The Safe Guards Around Peking". This was a very useful instrument, for, later on, when the Parliament, which had to be moved North for his convenience, was passing resolutions not quite to his taste, he used these guards to dissolve this troublesome legislative body.

The important post of the Commander-in-Chief of the Safe Guards Around Peking was given to Li Shiao Ming, in whom the President had great confidence and when the appointment was announced, an unexpected visitor came to his Headquarters to ask to be directed to his private residence. When the card was handed in, Shiao Ming, who was enjoying a sumptuous supper with his latest concubine, asked the servant to usher in the visitor immediately. He looked at his concubine, who was bejewelled all over and attired in most extravagant silk dresses, and smiled with pride.

"Come in, Lotus Fragrance," he called out triumphantly. "I never thought that I would come to you after all," Lotus Fragrance said with almost a sob. She was plainly dressed. There was not a shred of silk on her. She wore not a single article of jewellery. She had used neither rouge nor powder. Her hair was done in the most simple manner. Yet somehow or other, the beautifully decorated lady felt that she would like to be introduced to the visitor's tailor and coiffeur and to ask her a few questions about beauty culture.

"Neither do I. But all the same, you are always welcome at my house," he said. "This is my humble concubine."

Lotus Fragrance made a slight bow and looked at the lady with uneasiness. She turned to Shiao Ming and asked appealingly.

“May I speak to you alone?”

“By all means,” and he waved to his concubine telling her to retire.

The lady left with misgivings and was ready to have a good quarrel later on.

“Judging by your dress and the colour of your eyes, I hope you are not going to tell me that you are a widow. I confess that with my limited experience, I do not know how to deal with widows . . .”

“Stop your nonsense! I came to you for the sake of my daughter.”

“You can’t say it’s my daughter! How old is she?”

“Thirteen.”

“Of course thirteen! How stupid of me! I might have known.” He calculated rapidly. “Yes, Ta Tung has left you for thirteen years.”

“And I am going to him with my daughter immediately. As it is unsafe to travel because of the martial law now in force around Peking, I come to ask you to grant me a safe conduct.”

“That is quite easy. You are a clever woman, indeed, the cleverest I have ever come across. Before you came, you must have had in mind something which you were sure would induce me to grant your request . . .”

“Yes. It is he.” She pointed to a portrait of Li Ming, hanging on the wall.

“My father? What has he to do with this?”

“He was also my father.” She wiped her tears and continued. “When, two years ago, my mother was about to die, she wrote me saying that after more than ten years’ devotion to Buddhism, she was entirely free from worldly considerations. She was above us poor mortals. To her,

what we held to be as honour was but emptiness. Knowing the grudge you bore against me, she wanted me to tell you about this, in order that I and Ta Tung should not suffer any longer from your malice. Life is a dream, she said. She was going to leave her dream and live in eternity. My mother had suffered Hell on earth because of your and my father, and she looked forward to her deliverance."

Shiao Ming seemed to be awakening from a dream and for a long time remained silent. For the first time in his life, he felt that in this world there were things at which it was as wrong to weep as to laugh.

"I disobeyed her," she went on, "because she was sacred to me and I had no wish to let anyone else know of her misconduct. I would never profane her posthumous honour for the sake of my safety. But when I now realise that it was mother-love that prompted her to order me to tell you, now that same love, applied to a younger generation, prompts me to ask you for a safe conduct for my daughter. This would be in accordance with her wish "

Moved by her strange way of reasoning, so feminine, so sentimental, so touching and yet so right, he said .

"I will give you whatever you wish. But I must tell you that nowhere is safe at present. There will be no real peace for a long time to come. I have no children. Doctors say I am hopeless. Your daughter is our father's only descendant. Let me take care of her. I have money, plenty of it. Years of services for Yuan had brought me wealth beyond my wish. She will be safe with me. Yuan is the most powerful man in China. He will crush anyone who dares to oppose him. I was spoiled by my father, my mother and my grandmother. I had not a good, strict education when young. I vow I'll see that your daughter, who is my niece, receives the best education that money can buy "

"How like your old self! You think of nobody but yourself!"

"Am I selfish? I am offering to give your daughter the best education in the world."

"Yes, first, because she is *your* father's flesh and blood, second because *you* have no children; and lastly because *you* want to make up for something *you* missed."

Shiao Ming kept silent.

"You must think of others. Would she be happy without her mother? For her sake I could refuse to go to Heaven!"

"Then let me support her. This, at least, you must accept."

"I cannot accept any money from you. Where does it come from? From Yuan! It is oil and fat squeezed out from common people. I won't touch it."

"Will you take your father's estate? It's enormous I have bought back everything that my mother and I formerly sold. She must be well educated, and I know Ta Tung can't be rich, nor will he ever be."

"No. Our father's wealth was also ill-gotten. I won't take it. Ta Tung is not and never will be rich. That is quite true. But I am not hard up. I have saved from my earnings in the service of the Empress Dowager enough to give her a decent education."

"Ha! And where does your money come from? The Empress Dowager. But is that not also the blood and sweat of the population which she oppressed?"

"But I earned it by honest labour and I don't go too far to find its origin. If you have any love for my daughter, please give me the safe conduct and say nothing more about money."

"All right, just as you wish. But will you promise me that whenever she needs any help, you will not forget that I have the first claim to help her?"

"I promise. But I don't think she will need it."

"Who knows? The country is in chaos, and in years to come, worse things may happen. Yuan is ambitious, and the South is stubborn. There will be clashes. That is why I advise you to leave the girl here."

"Yuan is ambitious? He has his heart's desire now. What else can he have?"

"Who knows? Time will tell."

On the following day, Lotus Fragrance left Peking with her daughter. The safe conduct was very helpful. For in the vicinity of the capital, soldiers continued to plunder, and Safe Guards had to be sent out on patrol all along the railways. It was certainly not President Yuan's secret order that his soldiers should act so outrageously, for if they were captured they were shot at The Bridge of Heaven after a very brief court martial conducted by Shiao Ming. Since the Revolution, The Bridge of Heaven had completely replaced all other traditional spots as the official execution grounds, and now not a single day would pass without some poor devil going to the other world by the way of this wretched place. Nor was it the President's intention to allow the Safe Guards, under the pretext of maintaining order, to commit all kinds of outrages to travellers to and from Peking. But there was an old saying to the effect that "if the main beam is not straight, the others are bound to slant". However, the safe conduct given to the mother and daughter by Shiao Ming afforded the necessary protection.

When they arrived at Nanchang, they found Ta Tung was waiting for them at the wharf. Lotus Fragrance, on seeing him, lowered her eyes and exclaimed softly

"At last!"

Elegance Radiance blushed from ear to ear; looking carefully at the ground, she approached her father slowly. Taking in one of his hands which she hesitatingly

extended to him, with the other hand he lifted her head and looked steadily into her face. He turned to his wife and whispered.

“So, this is the vital reason. I agree.”

Shiao Ming had wired his lawyers in Nanchang to transfer all the title deeds of his father's old estates to Lotus Fragrance and she did not know what to do with them. Ta Tung suggested

“Your father built that wretched bridge and the result was this mess and calamity. Now the old bridge is nearly rotten and a constant danger to passers-by. Why not rebuild it with all his money by using the best material obtainable and redeem his sin. I'll be the foreman and return all those marbles which he took away from the old bridge.”

This was the solution. And before he made his trip to the South Sea to bury Ting's ashes in the deserted island, The Bridge of Heaven was rebuilt under his supervision according to a sketch which Lotus Fragrance made from memory of a marble bridge in the Summer Palace. It was beautiful as well as strong, it could bear the heaviest burden over it and allow ample passage of the biggest junk beneath it. Up to the present day whenever people near the city of Nanchang talk about the bridge, they invariably exclaim.

“Thank Heaven!”

Such a remark is well justified. On the banks near each end of the bridge a number of drooping willows constantly wave their pliant stems. Their leaves, in delicate green and fresh yellow, come dancing down following every gentle breeze and alight among the abundant rushes in the water. In autumn, when the trees are bare of leaves, the rushes are full of white cotton puffs. Sometimes one may see a solitary wild goose, having lost its companions on their way south from the great Po-Yang Lake, spend a night

here in appreciation of the beauty of the scene

At midday on a sunny, warm day, when the passengers over and under this majestic archway are busy and noisy, one cannot see the true face of the bridge. But when the people have gone home, the birds and fish are resting, and the sun is setting with a touch of bright red on the western horizon, the white marble stands out prominently against the glowing background, or when the moon is on the wane and the chilly dew is glistening on the pale stone, or when the rain is drizzling down and a lone boat, without anyone at the helm, is floating in a slanting position; or when the mist in the atmosphere is beginning to clear away, the sun peeping out slowly from behind the trees and a fisherman is making a creaking sound with his oars in his small boat—then is the best time to see the heavenly bridge as a picture of perfect harmony

The scene around the bridge continues to change. The passengers over and under the bridge, whether they are happy or sad, whether they are united with their beloved ones, or separated from them, continue to change. But The Bridge of Heaven remains there for ever, firm and majestic, a thing of beauty and blessing to all

THE END

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN CHINA, 1879-1912

- 1879 Japanese annexation of the Chinese Colony, the Liu Chiu Islands
- 1880 Land Telegraph lines sanctioned by the Government
- 1881 "Chinese Rocket", the first Chinese locomotive in China, made its maiden trip
- 1882 French troops occupied Honai, capital of Annam, the Chinese protectorate
- 1883 France declared Annam her protectorate.
- 1884 Franco-Chinese War over Annam.
- 1885 Peace Treaty with France signed, concession of Annam protectorate to France
British troops occupied Burma, the Chinese protectorate
- 1886 Concession of Burma protectorate to Britain
- 1887 Mathematics included in the curriculum of State Examinations
- 1888 Building of the New Summer Palace by Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi
- 1889 Emperor Kwang Hsu given ruling power, Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi retired
- 1890 Anglo-Chinese Convention *re* Tibet signed.
- 1891 Missionary buildings in Hupeh burnt by members of secret societies.
- 1892 Imperial Edict suppressing secret societies
- 1893 Peking-Shanhaikwan Railway completed
- 1894 Japan invaded Korea and attacked the Chinese Navy, Sino-Japanese War declared
Shin Chung Hui, the revolutionary society, established by Dr Sun Wen (later known as Sun Yat-Sen)
- 1895 Peace Treaty with Japan signed, Formosa ceded to Japan
Headquarters of Shin Chung Hui established in Hongkong
Outbreak in Canton, planned by Dr Sun Yat-Sen, failed.
Reform proposals submitted by Kang Yu-Wei
- 1896 Chinese Post Office officially opened.
- 1897 Germany seized Tsing-Tao and Kiao-Chow.
- 1898 Lease of Darien and Port Arthur to Russia
Bay of Canton seized by France
Lease of Kow-Loon hinterland (opposite Hongkong) to Britain

- Reform by Emperor Kwang Hsu.
 Li Ti-Mo-Tai (Timothy Richard) submitted the Eight Points
 for Reform.
 Establishment of the Peking University.
 Promotion of Yuan Shih-Kai, the Inspector of Forces in the
 Metropolitan Province.
 Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi seized power again
 Imprisonment of Emperor Kwang Hsu and execution of
 six Reform leaders
- 1899 Boxer Rising started in Shantung
 1900 Boxers attacked Legations in Peking
 Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi declared war against "all
 foreigners in the world".
 Allied Forces of the Eight Powers entered Peking.
 Dr Sun Yat-Sen elected President-in-Chief of all secret
 societies
 Tang, a revolutionary, executed by Chang Chuh-Tung,
 Viceroy of Hunan and Hupeh
 Revolution started and failed in Waichow
 Shih, a revolutionary, trying to assassinate Teh Show,
 Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, captured and
 executed
 Yang, a leader of the Shin Chung Hui, assassinated by
 Viceroy Teh Show's men.
- 1901 Peace Treaty with the Eight Powers concluded, China
 paying an indemnity of 450,000,000 taels of silver
 (982,238,150 taels of silver including interest)
- 1902 Hung, Li and Hsia, members of Shin Chung Hui, plotted to
 start revolution in Canton and failed
- 1903 Suppression of the revolutionary paper *Su Pao* in Shanghai
- 1904 Hwang Shin, follower of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, started revolution
 in Hunan and failed.
- Russo-Japanese War started in Chinese territory
- 1905 Wu Yueh tried to assassinate Princes and Ministers at the
 East Railway Station, Peking
 Shin Chung Hui re-organised into Tung Min Hui, or the
 China Union Society.
- Russia defeated by Japan
- 1906 Imperial Edict issued in preparation for Constitutional
 Government
- 1907 Eight outbreaks by members of the China Union Society
 started and failed

- 1908 Death of Emperor Kwang Hsu, followed by Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi.
Degradation of Yuan Shih-Kai
Three outbreaks by members of the China Union Society started and failed.
- 1909 Succession of Emperor Hsuan Tung (Henry Pu-Yi, now puppet Emperor of the Japanese sponsored "Manchukuo").
Hsiung, a revolutionary, attempted to assassinate an Imperial Prince and was executed.
- 1910 The New Army in Canton started revolution and was defeated
An attempt to assassinate the Prince Regent in Peking failed.
- 1911 Three outbreaks in Canton by members of the China Union Society failed
Bombs exploded by accident in the Russia Concession in Hankow on October 9th; Sun Wu, a revolutionary leader, seriously wounded
Revolution started in Wu Chang and the New Army joined in General Chang Piao, of the 8th Division, and Viceroy Jui Chen escaped. Li Yuan-Hung ("Li, the Buddha"), Brigadier-General of the 15th Brigade, elected head of the Revolutionary Military Government, October 10th
Yuan Shih-Kai appointed Viceroy of Hunan and Hupeh, October 14th
Various Provinces in the South declared their independence.
Imperial Edict issued laying blame on "Ourselves", October 30th.
Yuan Shih-Kai appointed Prime Minister, November 1st, came to Peking November 11th
- Peace Conference between the North and the South started December 3rd
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen elected the 1st Provisional President, December 30th.
- 1912 Dr Sun Yat-Sen entered office January 1st.
Imperial Edict of Abdication issued February 12th.
President Sun Yat-Sen's resignation, February 13th.
Yuan Shih-Kai elected President, February 15th.

